

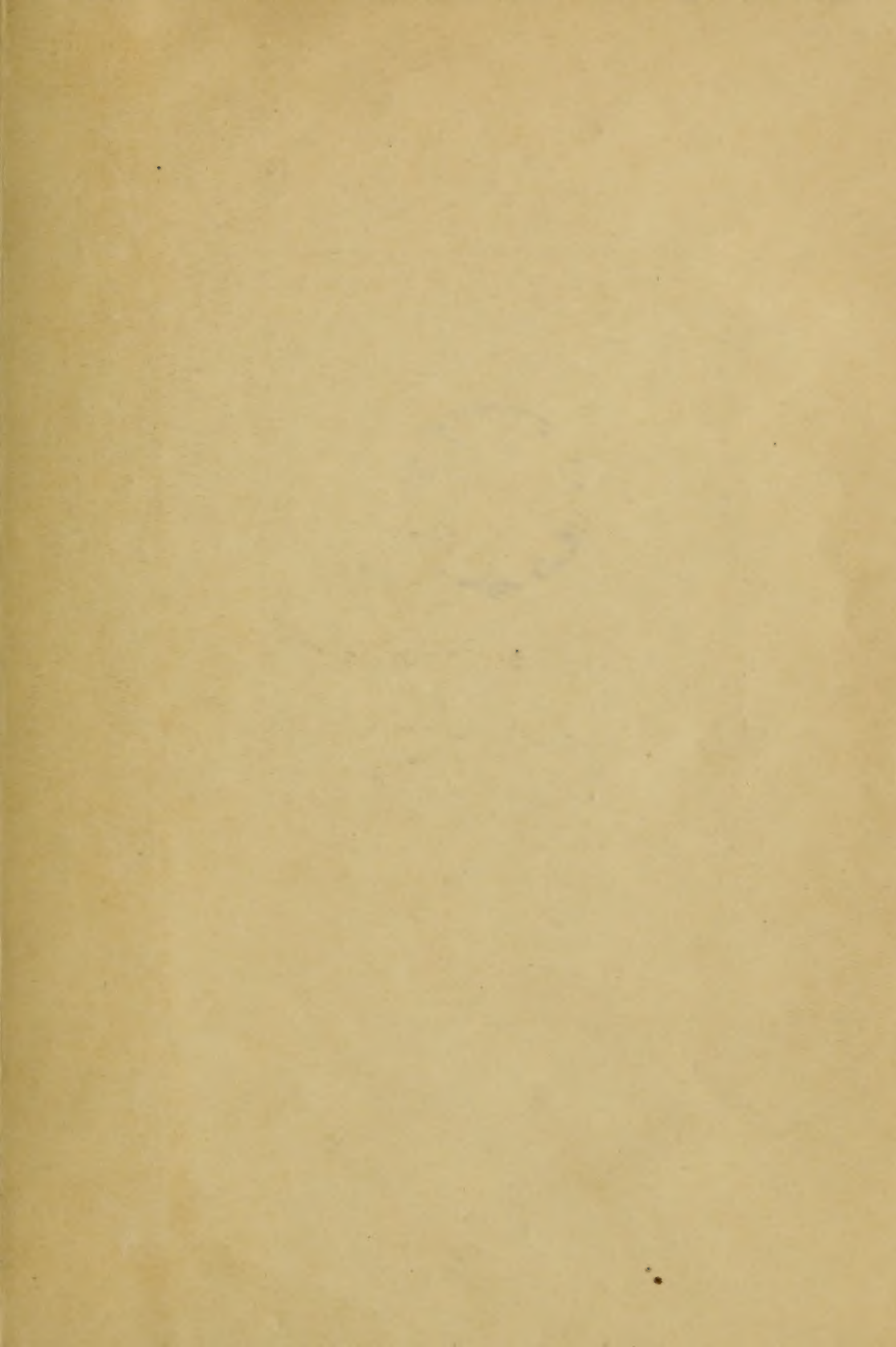
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POETS' COUNTRY
EDITED BY
ANDREW LANG
ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANCIS S. WALKER




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POETS' COUNTRY



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DOVE COTTAGE, GRASMERE

Dove Cottage was the home of Wordsworth for seven years and bears traces of his care. Many of the flowering shrubs were planted by his own hand. The stones laid down in the garden are steps up its steep incline to a terrace higher than the cottage, over which he had a view of Grasmere Lake, and of Silver How beyond.

When Wordsworth left Dove Cottage, De Quincey resided in it for many years.

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POETS' COUNTRY

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ANDREW LANG

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WITH FIFTY ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR BY

FRANCIS S. WALKER



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EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE purpose of this volume, as the title indicates, is to trace the relations of poets with the aspects of "their ain countrie," or with the scenes where they built their homes, or pitched their transient camps. "A wanderer is man from his birth," Mr. Matthew Arnold writes, and the habits of many poets have been nomadic. There is little of his native Devonshire in Coleridge; Sussex has no conspicuous part in the making of Shelley; the Muse of Byron is influenced rather by the Mediterranean than by Dee and Don. But other poets are home-keeping, like Wordsworth and Scott; their favourite scenes are those among which they were born and spent their years of boyhood and their later lives. Tennyson, too, had a strong attachment to his native "Brook"—in which, if *The Miller's Daughter* be autobiographic, he was a very idle angler—and to the level wastes of the Lincolnshire fen country. There are poets who "generalise" landscape; they give us "a practicable wood," a pasteboard cottage, a stream which

punctually "purls," and the rest of the *décor* of the eighteenth century. Drayton, on the other hand, seems to have had minute knowledge of every bourne and beck, as well as of every river, in England.

Some poets, anxious, in Wordsworth's phrase, "to write with their eyes on the object," take notes of landscape, as painters make rapid pencil sketches. To take such notes on aspects of the atmosphere, of the hills, woods, and even the most retiring species of the vegetable kingdom, was the practice of Wordsworth and of his sister Dorothy. The ingredients thus collected might or might not come handy in the composition of a poem. Thus Dorothy Wordsworth would chronicle the circumstance that "the moon was immensely large, the sky scattered over with clouds. These soon closed in, contracting the dimensions of the moon without concealing her." This note of phenomena very familiar was made in Somerset. Coleridge read it, and did it into blank verse, in a pocket-book :

Behind the thin
Grey cloud that covered but not hid the sky,
The round full moon looked small.

The piece of local colour was now ready for instant use, in case Coleridge was writing a poem in blank verse. Wordsworth also exploited Dorothy's note, in

his *Night - Piece*, lines 1-7. Finally, Coleridge, in *Christabel* (where the scene is Cumberland), did the note afresh into four lines, in the metre of that poem. All this learning Mr. Ernest Coleridge provides in his beautiful edition of *Christabel*.¹ It is not probable that most of our poets made notes in this conscientious way; though Scott wrote down the names of the local wild-flowers at Rokeby, as he was to write a poem with Rokeby for its centre.

To every poet his own method. The artist, Mr. Walker, has visited and pourtrayed scenes familiar to the singers; the business of the authors in this volume has been to study the poets' relations to the landscapes with which they were best acquainted, and, in some instances, to describe these scenes in their changed aspects of to-day. In other instances, notably in the case of Shelley, the Poets' Country is the "Land of Dreams" (as Homer says), and the sky and sea, which are changeless in their changefulness.

The influence of the Nature which environed poets in their youth has not a scientifically calculable effect on their genius. The mountains and the sea, as in Wordsworth's sonnet, may inspire a love of freedom; but, in the case of Oliver Cromwell (as Mr. Matthew Arnold remarked in an early prize poem on that states-

¹ Frowde. London, 1907.

man), the same effect may be produced by the flat scenery of the Midlands. The method of Monsieur Taine, and of others who unhesitatingly discover, for all effects, causes in the local environment, is a method of merely popular science.

The Editor should perhaps explain that he was asked, single-handed, to write the studies which accompany the pictures in this volume. Having neither the leisure nor the necessary literary and topographical knowledge, he suggested that writers better qualified than he should be invited to select the poets and scenes preferred by them. He mentioned some names, and Mr. Churton Collins, Mr. Coleridge, Mr. Loftie, with Mr. Macmillan, kindly undertook their pleasant tasks. The Editor has not dreamed of suggesting any alterations in their expressions of taste and opinion when (as will happen in matters of taste) there is some lack of grace of congruity between his impressions and those of his fellow-workers.

A. L.

ARTIST'S PREFACE

THE pictures in this book are of places associated with the poets either through their lives or scenes that are supposed to be sources of their inspiration.

The designs are not presented as illustrations of the words of the poets, rather as backgrounds characteristic of scenes that influenced their poetry; for example, the bold scenery of the Highlands is to Scott what the gentle scenery of Olney is to Cowper.

In some cases the scenes are undoubtedly those that have been immortalised by their writings, notably by Byron at Newstead, Gray at Stoke Poges, and I believe Burns at the Ayr and Doon, Wordsworth at the Lakes, Coleridge at Nether Stowey and the Quantocks. All of these poets make direct reference to actual places, and the pictures are intended to be sympathetic representations of them.

Other places designed are not mentioned in their poems, but represent such scenes as they have described. Some lines from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* seem to have been inspired by Shakespeare's love of the Avon, and are very characteristic of it.

Some pictures are of places in which the poets lived.

That of Milton in his garden at Chalfont St. Giles, during his blindness, suggests his love of flowers, and the pastoral landscape of the surrounding scenes is such as he has described, while the picture of him dictating shows an incident in his life's affliction. Shakespeare's birthplace and school, as well as the Hathaway cottage and church, are under this head of associations; also Eton and Bisham, as connected with Shelley.

The artist's efforts on the whole have been to carry out pictorially in every case some effect that came under his own observation, while painting each scene in the spirit of Coleridge's words on "the poetry of Nature":—

During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversation turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry—the power of exciting the sympathy of a reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of Nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colour of imagination. The sudden charm which accidents of light and shade, which moonlight or sunlight, diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both: these are the poetry of Nature.—Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*.

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SHAKESPEARE

It seems to be with Shakespeare as it is with Nature. As she fashions in her impartial thoroughness of workmanship, or reveals herself in her infinity of phases, so he depicts. Like hers his touch is as precise and finished in minutiae as in what is most eminent and impressive. Responsive and faithful to her in her most appalling and terrific manifestations, as in the thunderstorm in *Lear* and the tempest at sea in *Pericles*, in her scenes of awe-compelling grandeur as in his picture of Dover Cliff, in her phenomena of mingled grandeur and loveliness, her dawning and setting suns, her rivers, her seas, her landscapes, he is equally faithful to her in his representations of her minutest and most insignificant creations. In a truth very literal it may be said of Shakespeare as it was said of Wordsworth's Wanderer—

Early had he learned
To reverence the volume that displays
The mystery, the life which cannot die.
.
.
.
There did he see the writing;—all things there
Breathed immortality, revolving life
And greatness still revolving; infinite :

There littleness was not ; the least of things
 Seemed infinite ; and there his spirit shaped
 Her prospects.

Thence he learned

In many a calmer hour of sober thought
 To look on Nature with a humble heart,
 Self-questioned where it did not understand,
 And with a superstitious eye of love.

And that is the more remarkable, this minute care with which Shakespeare studied natural phenomena, when we remember that his work as a poet was in no way immediately concerned with them ; at most they could but furnish him with ornament, with what was essentially subordinate and collateral in his themes and in his aims. And now for a few illustrations which it will be seen not only indicate the keen interest with which they must have been regarded, as proved by the impression made on memory, but the close scrutiny to which most of them must have been submitted :

Cinque-spotted, like *the crimson drops*
I' the bottom of a convslip.

Cymbeline, II. ii.

“*Furr'd moss*” (*Cymbeline*, IV. ii.), “*Blue-veined violets*” (*Venus and Adonis*, 125), “*Cuckoo buds of yellow hue*” (*Love's Labour's Lost*, V. ii.), “*the ripest mulberry that will not hold the handling*” (*Coriolanus*, III. ii.), the “*willow that shows hoar leaves in the glassy stream*” (*Hamlet*, IV. vii.), “*the ousel-cock . . . with orange-tawny bill*” (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, III. i.), “*the russet-pated chough*” (*Midsummer Night's*

SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHPLACE

Behind Shakespeare's birthplace at Stratford-on-Avon lies the garden in which some fifty or sixty years ago were planted the trees, flowers, and shrubs mentioned in his plays. They have now grown into quite a picturesque old English garden.



Dream, III. ii.), “the *shard-borne beetle*” (*Macbeth*, III. ii.), “*sharded*” (*Cymbeline*, III. iii.), the “*red-hipp’d humble bee*” (*Midsummer Night’s Dream*, IV. i.), “the *gilded newt*” (*Timon of Athens*, IV. iii.), “for men, like butterflies, show not their *mealy wings*” (*Troilus and Cressida*, III. iii.), “*heavy-gaited toads*” (*Richard II.*, III. ii.), “the *staring owl*” (*Love’s Labour’s Lost*, V. ii.). There is the same minute observation in the description of the snail shrinking into its shell :—

Or as the snail, whose tender horns being hit,
Shrinks backwards in his shelly cave with pain,
And there, all smother’d up, in shade doth sit,
Long after fearing to creep forth again.

Venus and Adonis, 1033 *seqq.*

So, too, this of the violet when faded :—

The violet past prime,
And *sable curls* all silver’d o’er with white.

Sonnet XII.

It is not necessary to multiply these illustrations.

It is in the earlier years of life that all men are most susceptible of impressions from external nature which, becoming consecrated by memory and association, grow more vivid and influential as youth recedes. It was so with Sophocles and Theocritus, with Dante and Chaucer, with Wordsworth and Scott, with Crabbe and with Tennyson. And most assuredly it was so with Shakespeare. It was, however, his lot never wholly to be separated from his early surroundings, for it is probable that he visited Stratford occasionally

during the whole course of his life, and his closing years were certainly passed there. In considering him as a nature-painter it is not often, of course, possible to define and identify his pictures with particular localities, because he paints nature as he paints men, typically and in essence. But as he never depicted what he never saw—the individuals through a study of whom he penetrated to universal humanity were the men and women who surrounded him—so in his pictures of natural scenery, however generic might be his treatment of it, he rarely strayed—indeed, it was not necessary for him to stray—out of the sphere of what had long been familiar to him at home. If we except his pictures of the sea, they are not numerous; his pictures of mountains, they are meagre and still rarer; of Dover Cliff, it stands alone; all his nature-paintings resolve themselves into representations more or less typical of what could be seen in or about Stratford or within a radius of twenty miles of it. Illimitable as his genius was, its activity and range were always bounded, and bounded deliberately, by experience. Had he seen the Tropics or the Arctic regions, or had he crossed the Alps, can we doubt that we should have had pictures rivalling those of the storm in *Lear*, the sea-scenes in *Othello* and *Pericles*, and the idylls in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the *Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline*; or had he visited France or Italy or Spain, could we doubt that he would have been to Nature there what he was to Nature here?

Ruskin, commenting on the local influences affecting Shakespeare's nature-painting, makes some remarks which are worth transcribing :—

There was only one thing belonging to hills that Shakespeare seemed to feel as noble—the pine-tree—and that was because he had seen it in Warwickshire, clumps of pine occasionally rising on little sandstone mounds, as at the place of execution of Piers Gaveston, above the lowland woods. He touches on this tree fondly again and again :

As rough,
Their royal blood enchafed, as the rud'st wind
That by his top doth take the mountain pine,
And make him stoop to the vale.¹

The strong-based promontory
Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
The pine and cedar.²

Where note his observance of the peculiar horizontal roots of the pine, spurred as it is by them like the claw of a bird, and partly propped, as the aiguilles by those rock promontories at their bases which I have always called their spurs; this observance of the pine's strength and animal-like grasp being the chief reason for his choosing it, above other trees, for Ariel's prison. Again :

You may as well forbid the mountain pines
To wag their high tops, and to make no noise
When they are fretted with the gusts of heaven.³

And yet again :

But when from under this terrestrial ball
He fires the proud tops of the Eastern pines.⁴

We may judge, by the impression which this single feature of hill scenery seems to have made on Shakespeare's mind, because he had

¹ *Cymbeline*, iv. ii.

² *Tempest*, v. i.

³ *Merchant of Venice*, iv. i.

⁴ *Richard II.*, iii. ii.

seen it in his youth, how his whole temper would have been changed if he had lived in a more sublime country, and how essential it was to his power of contemplation of mankind that he should be removed from the sterner influences of Nature (*Modern Painters*, vol. iv. Part v. chapter xx.).

Now let us take the characteristic Stratford scenery—the Avon and the meadows on its banks—and see how they are recalled in his work. The lines in the *Midsummer Night's Dream* :—

The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud,
And the quaint mazes on the wanton green
For lack of tread are undistinguishable,

II. i.

simply photograph what may now be seen every spring, when the weather has been rainy, in the meadows by the theatre, the old game of Nine Men's Morris being still not obsolete. Strutt, in his *Sports and Pastimes* (Second Edition, p. 279), thus describes it :—

In that part of Warwickshire where Shakespeare was born, and the neighbouring parts of Northamptonshire, the shepherds and other boys dig up the turf with their knives to represent a sort of imperfect chessboard. It consists of a square, sometimes only a foot in diameter, sometimes three and four yards. Within this is another square, every side of which is parallel to the external square. . . . These figures are always cut upon the green turf or leys, as they are called, or upon the grass at the end of ploughed lands, and in rainy seasons never fail to be choked with mud.

The quaint mazes are, of course, the faery rings so conspicuous in these meadows.

In *Titus Andronicus*, III. i., we find what is one of

the most prominent features of that scenery every spring :—

Meadows yet not dry,
With miry slime left on them by a flood ;

and in rich abundance every spring,

. . . daisies pied and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver white,
And cuckoo buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,
Love's Labour's Lost, v. ii.

when

Proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
Hath put a spirit of youth in everything.
Sonnet xcviil.

To these scenes he was turning when he spoke of Lucrece's hand as the "perfect white" which

Show'd like an April daisy on the grass,
With pearly sweat, resembling dew of night ;

and her eyes,

Like marigolds had sheathed their light,

the daisy and marigold being most conspicuous in those richly fertile meadows. And what is the following but an April photograph of the river-side from Chalcote to the bathing-place ?

Thy banks with peonied and twilled brims,
Which spongy April at thy hest betrimms
To make cold nymphs chaste crowns ;
Tempest, iv. i.

"peonied and twilled brims" being river-banks covered

with marigolds and reeds. How often may he have seen on the Avon what he describes here—

A dive-dapper peering through a wave,
Who, being look'd on, ducks as quickly in.

Venus and Adonis, 86-87.

And here—

A vagabond flag¹ upon the stream
Goes to and back, lackeying the varying tide,
To rot itself with motion.

Antony and Cleopatra, i. iv.

Nor have we to go far to find many a spot which might have been the original of

There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
That shows his *hoar* leaves in the glassy stream;

Hamlet, iv. vii.

or the banks where poor Ophelia could gather her “fantastic garland” of

Crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name.

And how often might he have seen what Lysander looked to see—

To-morrow night, when Phæbe doth behold
Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass.

Midsummer Night's Dream, i. i.

Either the Avon itself, or perhaps one of the many brooks in the forest of Arden, possibly the brook that runs by Langley, near Clevedon, or the brook at

¹ i.e. bulrush.



Shottery, or, more likely perhaps, the brook at Wellesbourne, gave him, doubtless, this charming picture—

The current that with gentle murmur glides
Thou know'st, being stopp'd, impatiently doth rage ;
But when his fair course is not hindered,
He makes sweet music with th' enamell'd stones,
Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
He overtaketh in his pilgrimage :
And so by many winding nooks he strays
With willing sport to the wild ocean.

Two Gentlemen of Verona, II. vii.

The characteristic scenery of the neighbouring forest of Arden, with its brooks and lawns and glades, appears and reappears in his dramas. Here was the

Oak whose antique root peeps out
Upon the brook that brawls along this wood ;

As You Like It, II. i.

the oak

Whose boughs were moss'd with age,
And high top bald with dry antiquity ;

Idem, IV. iii.

the

Shade of melancholy boughs ;

Idem, II. vii.

the

Shadowy, desert, unfrequented woods,

in which Valentine sought solace (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, v. iv.). Here in one of the many glades intersecting it he might have seen the

Poor sequester'd stag,
That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt,
Did come to languish

. And thus the hairy fool,
 Much marked of the melancholy Jaques,
 Stood on the extremest verge of the swift brook,
 Augmenting it with tears.

Here might he often, in the hunting season, have witnessed and heard what he so vividly describes in the first scene of the fourth act of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* :—

Never did I hear
 Such gallant chiding, for, besides the groves,
 The skies, the fountains, every region near
 Seem'd all one mutual cry : I never heard
 So musical a discord, such sweet thunder ;

and what he depicts in the hunting scene in *Titus Andronicus*, II. i. We seem to trace this same scenery not only in *As You Like It*, but in the *Midsummer Night's Dream* and in *Timon of Athens*, but we see it only in glimpses. Shakespeare has nowhere given any detailed description of a forest or even of trees. It is on flowers that he dwells, and here his fancy absolutely revels. Who can forget

O Proserpina,
 For the flowers now, that frighted thou let'st fall
 From Dis's waggon ! Daffodils
 That come before the swallow dares, and take
 The winds of March with beauty ; violets, dim,
 But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
 Or Cytherea's breath ; pale primroses
 That die unmarried, ere they can behold
 Bright Phœbus in his strength—a malady
 Most incident to maids ; bold oxlips and
 The crown imperial ; lilies of all kinds,
 The flower-de-luce being one ;

and indeed the whole of the scene in which this lovely passage occurs (*Winter's Tale*, iv. iii.) and the not less magical passage in *Cymbeline* (iv. ii.) :—

With fairest flowers,
 Whilst Summer lasts and I live here, Fidele,
 I'll sweeten thy sad grave : thou shalt not lack
 The flower that's like thy face, pale primrose, nor
 The azur'd harebell, like they veins, no, nor
 The leaf of eglantine, whom not to slander
 Outsweetens not thy breath : the ruddock would
 With charitable bill,—O bill ! sore shaming
 Those rich-left heirs that let their fathers lie
 Without a monument !—bring thee all this,
 Yea, and furr'd moss besides, when flowers are none,
 To winter-ground thy corse.

So, too, Marina in *Pericles* (iv. i.) :—

No, I will rob Tellus of her weed
 To strew thy green with flowers ; the yellows, blues,
 The purple violets and marigolds,
 Shall as a carpet hang upon thy grave,
 While summer days do last.

How magical is the single line,

*The cowslips tall her pensioners be ;
 In their gold coats spots you see.*

Midsummer Night's Dream, II. i.

He seems to penetrate into the very life and soul of these, Nature's loveliest creations.

From her fair and unpolluted flesh
 May violets spring,

is the blessing on Ophelia.

There's rosemary, that's for remembrance ; and there's pansies,

that's for thoughts. . . . There's fennel for you, and columbines;
there's rue for you. . . . I would give you some violets, but they
withered all when my father died,

are poor Ophelia's bequests, just as Perdita afterwards,
in the *Winter's Tale*, distributes her presents, suiting
them to the various seasons of life. Illustrations
from them are always springing to his pen. Would
Belarius describe the boys Guiderius and Arviragus
(*Cymbeline*, iv. ii.),

They are as gentle
As zephyrs blowing below the violet,
Not wagging his sweet head,

or Montague the passion consuming Romeo, its victim is

As is the bud bit with an envious worm,
Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air,
Or dedicate his beauty to the sun;

while Juliet prays that

This bud of love by Summer's ripening breath
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.

So Laertes warns Ophelia that

The canker galls the infants of the Spring
Too oft before their buttons be disclosed.

Indeed his dramas abound in such natural images as
surrounded him on all sides in his beautiful rural home.
A walk in the neighbourhood of Wire Brake Brank
would probably now give us the original of

So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle
Gently entwist: the female ivy so
Enrings the barky fingers of the elm.

Midsummer Night's Dream, iv. i.

The elm, to which Shakespeare so often refers, is, it may be noted, a very prominent feature in and around Stratford. At times we feel as if we could actually localise his pictures. For example, the beautiful passage in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*,

I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,

II. i.

might quite well have been the Scarbank above Hampton Lucy, or the bank on the Evesham road above Shottery, just as

The pleachèd bower
Where honeysuckles ripen'd by the sun
Forbid the sun to enter,

Much Ado about Nothing, III. i.

may still be seen at Clifford Chambers. A ramble any late autumn day about the lanes near Stratford would bring before us what is so magically depicted in the seventy-third Sonnet :—

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang ;

or at another season recall

The birds chant melody on every bush ;
The green leaves quiver with the cooling wind,
And make a chequer'd shadow on the ground.

And whilst the babbling echo mocks the hounds,
Replaying shrilly to the well-tun'd horns,
Let us sit down.

Titus Andronicus, II. ii.

On Shakespeare's reference to birds, whose songs seem to have had the same charm for his ear that flowers had for his eye, it is not necessary to dwell, but of his accuracy with respect to them we have a striking illustration in his noting that the nightingale's song ceases early in summer :—

As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
And stops her pipe in growth of riper days ;
Sonnet cii.

so different from Milton, who makes it “trill her thick-warbled notes the summer long.”¹

Of natural phenomena nothing seems to have had so much attraction for Shakespeare as dawn and the early morning, of which, it may be noted, he could have had an excellent view from the upper windows of his father's house in Henley Street. His descriptions, indeed, are always masterpieces. Take the following :—

Lo ! here the gentle lark, weary of rest,
From his moist cabinet mounts up on high,
And wakes the morning, from whose silver breast
The sun ariseth in his majesty,
Who doth the world so gloriously behold
That cedar-tops and hills seem burnish'd gold.
Venus and Adonis, 853-858.

Put this beside—

Hark ! hark ! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
And Phœbus 'gins arise,
His steeds to water at those springs
On chalic'd flowers that lies ;
And winking Mary-buds begin
To ope their golden eyes :

¹ *Paradise Regained*, IV. 248.



With everything that pretty is,
My lady sweet, arise :
Arise, arise.

Cymbeline, II. iii.

In the twenty-ninth Sonnet we find this beautiful application of it :—

Haply I think on thee,—and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate.

He paints it indeed in all its phases :—

Look, love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east.
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.
Romeo and Juliet, III. v.

Again, with more detail, in the same play :—

The grey-ey'd morn smiles on the frowning night,
Chequering the eastern clouds with streaks of light,
And flecked darkness like a drunkard reels
From forth day's path, and Titan's fiery wheels.
Idem, II. ii.

So in *Hamlet*, I. i. :—

But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.

The ghost adds another touch :—

The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
And 'gins to pale his ineffectual fire.

So in the seventh Sonnet :—

Lo ! in the orient when the gracious light
Lifts up his burning head, etc.

Now we have it reflected in water :—

Even till the eastern gate, all fiery-red,
Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams,
Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams.

Midsummer Night's Dream, III. ii.

So too in Sonnet thirty-three :—

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy.

Now in its effect on the dew :—

As is the morning's silver-melting dew
Against the golden splendour of the sun.

Lucrece, 24-25.

Now on trees, how it

Fires the proud tops of the eastern pines.

Richard II., III. ii.

How vivid is his picture of it breaking threateningly
for storm in 1 *Henry IV.*, v. i. :—

K. HENRY. How bloodily the sun begins to peer
Above yon bosky hill! the day looks pale
At his distemperature.

PRINCE. The Southern wind
Doth play the trumpet to his purposes,
And by his hollow whistling in the leaves
Foretells a tempest and a blustering day.

Of sunset he has given, I think, only one detailed
description ; it is in *King John*, v. iv. :—

This night, whose black contagious breath
Already smokes above the burning crest
Of the old, feeble, and day-wearied sun.

Of the approach of night we have that magical picture in eleven words :

Light thickens, and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood.

Macbeth, III. ii.

Cloudland he had also watched with interest. Where was it ever depicted more graphically than in *Antony and Cleopatra* (IV. xiv.) ?

ANT. Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish ;
A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,
A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,
A forked mountain or blue promontory,
With trees upon't, that nod unto the world,
And mock our eyes with air : thou hast seen these signs ;
They are black Vesper's pageants.

EROS. Ay, my lord.

ANT. That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.

Fancy is no doubt mainly responsible for

As is a winged messenger of heaven
Unto the white upturned wond'ring eyes
Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him,
When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds
And sails upon the bosom of the air.

Romeo and Juliet, II. ii.

How the starry heavens affected him is shown by the passage, which it is scarcely necessary to quote :—

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank !

Sit, Jessica : look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patins of bright gold.

There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubins.

Merchant of Venice, v. i.

Nor must we forget his magical tribute to the "queen
o' the sky":—

Hail, many-colour'd messenger, that ne'er
Dost disobey the wife of Jupiter;
Who with thy saffron wings upon my flowers
Diffusest honey-drops, refreshing showers,
And with each end of thy blue bow dost crown
My bosky acres, and my unshrub'd down,
Rich scarf to my proud earth.

Tempest, iv. i.

The last three verses very exactly apply to what he
might often have witnessed in his native place.

It is not possible to localise the picture of Macbeth's
castle, but generically there were many country seats
within his ken in his Stratford days which might have
suggested it:—

DUNCAN. This castle hath a pleasant seat: the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.

BANQUO. This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
By his lov'd mansionry that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,
Buttress nor coign of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle:
Where they most breed and haunt I have observ'd
The air is delicate.

Macbeth, i. vi.

But if his pencil labours most in painting Nature in
her calm and beauty, he has also painted her, with

equal vividness, in her wrath. Take the picture of the storm in *Lear* :—

Alack! the night comes on, and the bleak winds
Do sorely ruffle; . . .

The to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain.

Things that love night
Love not such nights as these: the wrathful skies
Gallow the very wanderers of the dark,
And make them keep their caves. Since I was man
Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never
Remember to have heard: man's nature cannot carry
The affliction nor the fear.

Lear, II. iv., III. i. and ii.

So, too, though not in such graphic detail, the night described by Lennox in *Macbeth* (II. ii.). Lightning he always describes with singular vividness; so in *Lear* (III. ii.) :—

You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts.

And IV. vii. :—

Was this a face
To be exposed to the warring winds,
To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder,
In the most terrible and nimble stroke
Of quick cross lightning?

So in *Pericles*, III. i., we have the “nimble sulphurous flashes.” And in *Julius Cæsar*, I. iii. :—

And when the cross blue lightning seem'd to open
The breast of heaven.

How admirably is sheet lightning described in *Mid-summer Night's Dream*, I. i. :—

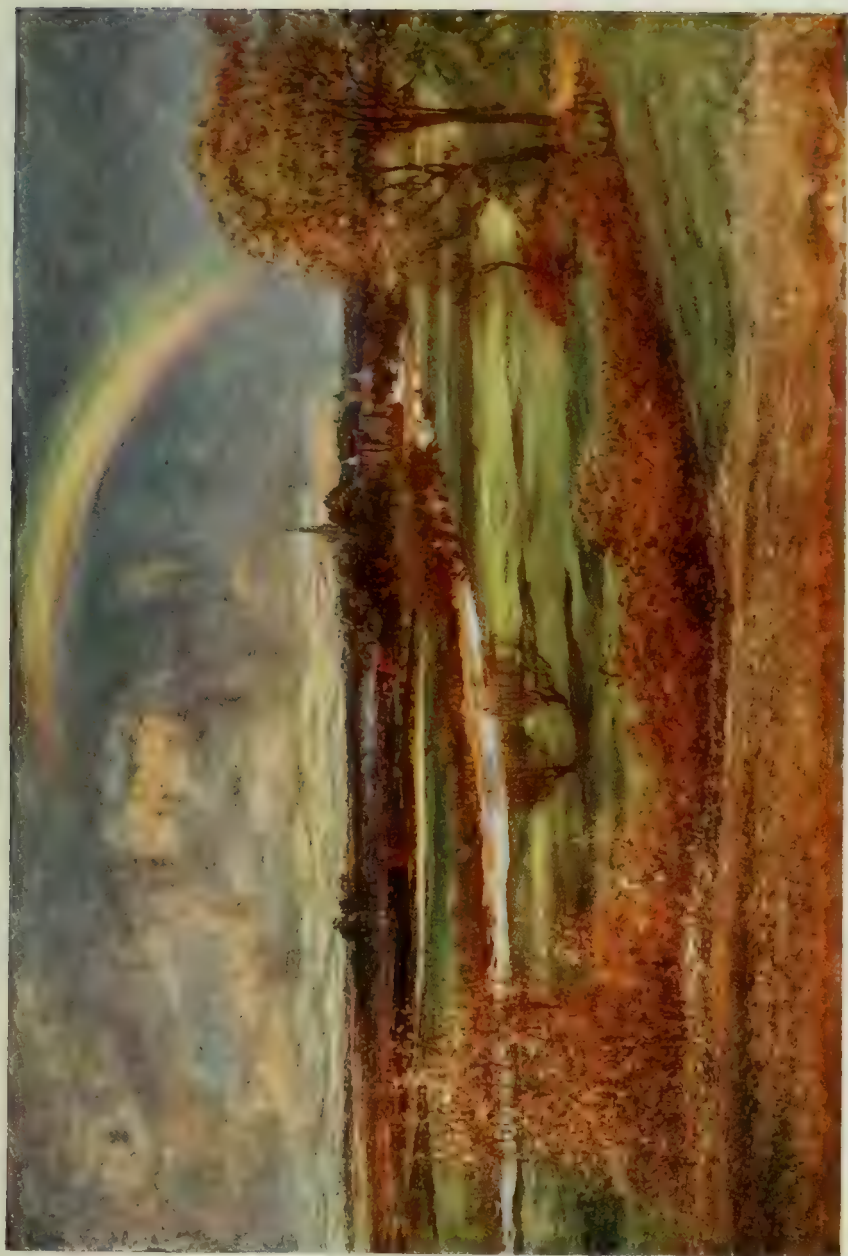
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,
 That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,
 And ere a man hath power to say, "Behold!"
 The jaws of darkness do devour it up.

And now let us turn to what he could not possibly have witnessed in the scenes amid which his youth was passed, and which have furnished him with so much of the material of his poetry. Such would be his superb description of Dover Cliff in *Lea*r, iv. vi. :—

Come on, sir, here's the place ; stand still. How fearful
 And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low !
 The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
 Show scarce so gross as beetles : half-way down
 Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade !
 Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
 The fishermen that walk upon the beach
 Appear like mice, and yon tall anchoring bark
 Diminish'd to her cock, her cock a buoy
 Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge
 That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes
 Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,
 Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight
 Topple down headlong.

There is one very vivid picture in the *Rape of Lucrece* which may have been suggested to him by what he saw on the Thames at London Bridge ; the water there, in his day and long afterwards, rushed like a cataract through the narrow middle arches :—

As through an arch the violent roaring tide
 Outruns the eye that doth behold his haste ;



Yet in the eddy boundeth in his pride
 Back to the strait that fore'd him on so fast;
 In rage sent out, recall'd in rage, being past.

Lucrece, 1667-1671.

His indifference to mountain scenery, on which he never dwells, to which, indeed, he scarcely ever refers, Ruskin attributes to the fact that he never saw mountains in early life, as they were no feature in the scenery about his home. If I am not mistaken, there is only one vivid touch of mountain picturing in all his works. It is in the *Midsummer Night's Dream* (IV. i.) :—

These things seem small and undistinguishable,
 Like far-off mountains turned into clouds.

Certainly we have in *Romeo and Juliet* “jocund day” standing on the “mountain’s misty top.” The only other passage in which he dwells on them could hardly have been written by a poet for whom they had attraction :—

As doth the melted snow
 Upon the valleys, whose low vassal seat
 The Alps doth spit and void his rheum upon.

Henry V., III. v.

But this certainly does not apply to a feature of Nature to which in his early impressionable days—supposing he did not then leave Stratford—he must have been equally a stranger—the sea. It is abundantly clear that Shakespeare must have been well acquainted with the sea, and that it must have had a great fascination for him. No one who had not had his eye on his object could possibly have written,

Upon the beached verge of the salt flood ;
Which once a day with his embossed froth
The turbulent surge shall cover.

Timon of Athens, v. i.

Or,

As fearfully as doth a galled rock
O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,
Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.

Henry V., III. i.

Or,

Gazing upon a late embarked friend,
Till the wild waves will have him seen no more,
Whose ridges with the meeting clouds contend ;

Venus and Adonis, 818-820.

though this last may possibly have been suggested by
Ovid.

Take, again, the following from *Othello*, II. i. :—

MONTANO. What from the cape can you discern at sea ?

1st GENT. Nothing at all : it is a high-wrought flood :
I cannot 'twixt the heaven and the main
Descry a sail.

MON. Methinks the wind hath spoke aloud at land ;
A fuller blast ne'er shook our battlements ;
If it hath ruffian'd so upon the sea,
What ribs of oak, when mountains melt on them,
Can hold the mortise ?

2ND GENT.

Do but stand upon the foaming shore,
The chidden billow seems to pelt the clouds ;
The wind-shak'd surge with high and monstrous mane
Seems to cast water on the burning bear,
And quench the guards of the ever-fixed pole.

Still more vivid is the picture in 2 *Henry IV.*, III. i. :—

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains

In cradle of the rude imperious surge,
 And in the visitation of the winds,
 Who take the ruffian billows by the top,
 Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them
 With deaf'ning clamour in the slippery clouds,
 That with the hurly death itself awakes?

See, too, the first scene of the third act of *Pericles*.
 The triumphant conflict of man's handiwork with this
 terrible adversary evidently appealed to his sympathy,
 finding expression in two noble passages:—

If after every tempest come such calms,
 May the winds blow till they awaken death,
 And let the labouring bark climb hills of seas,
 Olympus-high, and duck again as low
 As hell's from heaven.

Othello, II. I.

The sea being smooth,
 How many shallow bauble boats dare sail
 Upon her patient breast, making their way
 With those of nobler bulk!
 But let the ruffian Boreas once enrage
 The gentle Thetis, and anon behold
 The strong-ribb'd bark through liquid mountains cut,
 Bounding between the two moist elements
 Like Perseus' horse.

Troilus and Cressida, I. iii.

The picture in the *Winter's Tale*, III. iii.—

Now the ship boring the moon with her mainmast, and anon
 swallowed with yest and froth, as you'd thrust a cork into a
 hogshead—

could never have been painted without experience; the
 very epithet *yesty* (*Macbeth*, IV. i.)—"the yesty waves
 confound and swallow navigation up"—oddly enough

condemned in a Greek poet by Longinus as undignified—could only have come straight from observation. We have the same accurate sea-study in the line in *Lear* (iv. v.), “whelk’d and wav’d like the enridged sea,” and in the beautiful line in *Timon* (iv. iii.):

Lie where the light foam of the sea may beat
Thy grave-stone daily.

In 2 *Henry VI.*, III. ii., we have a curiously accurate and minute touch of sea-shore painting:

The splitting rocks cower’d in the sinking sands.

There can, indeed, be little doubt that, landsman though he was, the sea had a fascination for Shakespeare, and he must have known it and its surroundings well. His description—we must allow for poetic exaggeration—of Dover Cliff and his frequent references in various forms to that

Pale, that white-faced shore,
Whose foot spurns back the ocean’s roaring tides,

might seem to indicate that it was at Dover he became familiar with this feature of Nature.

Natural description necessarily holds an entirely subordinate place in his work, and it is among the many marvels associated with this prodigious genius that his observation should have been as sleepless and as accurate, his touch as masterly and as unfaltering here as it is in all that pertains to the themes which are so peculiarly his own.



Wm. S. F. 1860

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

1770-1850

AFTER he was turned five-and-twenty Wordsworth rented or occupied five homesteads.¹ Each one differed from the other in size and character, but they were all of them *country* houses, interesting and attractive in themselves, and in the midst of beautiful scenery. He was not born "in the purple," nor, on the other hand, in the "modest russet brown." Coleridge would have called his father's house at Cockermouth a *mansion*. Seventeen windows (I have counted them "from side to side") look across a low-walled garden strip into the main street. Behind the house, at the foot of the garden, flows the Derwent, close beneath "a terrace walk." He tells us, in *The Prelude*, that "the bright blue river" sent a voice "that flowed along my dreams," and that its smooth breast reflected the

¹ I have some personal knowledge of all five. Racedown and Dove Cottage and Rydal Mount I have visited recently. But I am largely indebted to the following works for most of the information contained in this essay, viz. : *Dove Cottage*, by Stopford H. Brooke, 1890 ; *Dove Cottage*, by Professor Knight, 1900 ; *Literary Associations of the English Lakes*, by the Rev. H. D. Rawnsley, 2 vols., 1906 ; *The Poetical Works of W. Wordsworth*, edited by Professor Knight, 8 vols., 1896 ; and to the Oxford edition of *Wordsworth's Poems*, edited by T. Hutchinson.

towers of Cockermouth Castle—"a shattered monument of feudal sway." Close at hand was, but is not, a small mill-race which flowed through sandy fields—"flowery groves of yellow ragwort." Away to the west loomed "Skiddaw's lofty height—bronzed with deepest radiance." If it is true that "a five-year child" he used to "plunge and bask alternate" in the mill-race, from morn to noon, from noon to eve of a long summer's day, he must have been what "nurses call a limb"! It is no wonder that his mother was anxious, and wondered whether her poetic child would turn out a genius, or a wastrel, or "haply" both.

Very different, but even more inspiring, were his surroundings at Hawkshead, where he attended the "free grammar-school" from 1778 to 1787. His "Dame's" cottage, where he boarded, was not a "cottage of gentility." "It is," says Professor Knight, "a humble dwelling of two storeys. The floor of the basement flat, paved with blue flags of Coniston slate, is probably just as it was in Wordsworth's time." Wordsworth's bedroom, which faced south-west, is on the left of the cottage. Once after he had gone to Cambridge he revisited his old school, half-proud, half-ashamed of his "gay attire." He had been unmindful of the past, but the past returns to him as he lies in his "accustomed bed":—

That lowly bed whence I had heard the wind
Roar and the rain beat hard, where I so oft
Had lain awake on summer nights to watch
The moon in splendour couched among the leaves



Of a tall ash, that near our cottage stood ;
 Had watched her with fixed eyes, while to and fro
 In the dark summit of the waving tree
 She rocked with every impulse of the breeze.

Prelude, Book IV. ll. 85-92.

The earlier and greater books of *The Prelude* contain an ample and illuminative record of Wordsworth's school days, and of the effect of his "way of life" and of the mountain scenery on his poetical and spiritual development. Here and there it may be difficult to repress a smile at the solemn paraphrases in which he records his lapses from virtue in the matter of "springes to catch woodcocks": other men had laboured—had set the springes,—but "the bird . . . became my prey." "Carnage," as he afterwards maintained, is "God's daughter"; but "who commanded" this unsportsman-like behaviour?

But apart from these "variations," as Byron would have called them, his self-revelation is, as Coleridge called it, "an orphic song indeed":—

A song divine of high and passionate thoughts
 To their own music chaunted !

Two passages may be quoted which contain the conclusion of the whole matter. They recount rather than define the sources of "the visionary power" as it came to him by night, and dwelt with him by day :—

For I would walk alone,
 Under the quiet stars, and at that time
 Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound
 To breathe an elevated mood, by form

Lowther, unlike the lakes and mountains, is rich in border castles and legendary associations. Nature and "old Romance" are met together, and in their spiritual union Wordsworth found a second inspiration. Part of his second Long Vacation of 1789 was spent at Penrith. His sister Dorothy was once more, "after separation desolate," his companion—the "Young Lady" to whom he dedicated *The Evening Walk*, written in 1789, but published in 1793. One of their favourite excursions was to Brougham Castle, which once commanded, and still looks down on, the meeting of the Lowther and the Eamont. Then, as now, the "mouldering towers" were neglected, unguarded, and, happily, unrestored, and the curious or reverent visitor could go round about them or climb them where he could and as he dared. Then, as now, it was possible to lie

On some turret's head,
Catching from tufts of grass and harebell flowers
Their faintest whisper to the passing breeze.

Prelude, Book VI. ll. 220-222.

Eastward, across the Eden, stretches the vast rampart of Cross Fell, seamed with misty hollows, "a distant wall of opal hills." To the west and south-west are the unfamiliar shapes of distant mountains, and near at hand the park-like vale of the river Eamont, no longer "unnamed in song," but named for ever in one of the greatest of all songs, the *Song of the Feast of Brougham Castle*. It was doubtless in these early wanderings on Penrith Beacon, then a bare and open

fell, or nearer home by Arthur's Round Table and Maybrough's "stones of mystic power," to Yanwath Hall, that the brother and sister consecrated their lives to each other and to the industry of song. The Derwent sent his voice along his childhood's dream, the Rotha (or, to be severely accurate, the Raise Beck) flows by his grave, but "Eamont's murmur mingled" with all the glad anticipations of "youth's golden gleam."

The six years which followed this home-coming was one protracted "wander-year." They made and unmade him a republican and a revolutionary. They helped to mould the man by compressing and concentrating his aspirations, by informing him what he should not do, and whither his steps should not turn, but they left him as they found him, a poet and not a man of the world.

A small legacy and the offer of a furnished house, a garden, and an orchard rent-free brought his wanderings to a final close. In October 1795 the brother and sister took up their quarters at Racedown Lodge, a small farmhouse on the north-west slope of Pilsdon Pen. Lewston Hill (the "Lewesdon Hill" of Crowe's Poem), its "tall twin brother," stands a little to the east. The house, which is built foursquare to all the winds of heaven, is not without its dignities and amenities in respect of panelling and finely moulded ceilings. "Our common parlour," wrote Dorothy, "is the prettiest little room that can be." The upper rooms, which are not so very little, command a view of upland woods and

“steepy” downs. Close to the house is a kitchen garden, and on its walls and in many a chink and cranny of the walls of the house clumps of hart’s-tongue and wall-rue and spleenwort find “a harbour and a hold.” The house stands back from the public road between Crewkerne and Axminster, at the farther end of a park-like field or paddock dotted with more than one huge oak-tree. It was across this pathless field, “by which he cut off an angle,” that Coleridge at the end of a forty-mile walk from Nether Stowey in Somersetshire, “bounded,” one summer evening in 1797, when he paid his first visit to Racedown. “He did not keep to the high road, but leapt over a gate.” More than fifty years afterwards the aged poet and his sister “retained the liveliest possible image of his appearance.”

During the eighteen months which Wordsworth spent at Racedown he wrote his tragedy of *The Borderers*, and he began the story of Margaret and the Ruined Cottage which was afterwards incorporated in the First Book of *The Excursion*. He says that “for several passages describing the employment and demeanour of Margaret during her affliction I am indebted to observations made in Dorsetshire”; but there is hardly a trace of Dorsetshire scenery in either the drama or the poem. Of Pilsdon or Lewesdon, which reminded Dorothy of “her native wilds,” or of Lyme or Pinney, “with its green chasms between romantic rocks,” which delighted Miss Austen, there is never a word. When she was in Scotland by the “waters of Leven,”



This woman dwelt in Dorsetshire,
Her hut was on a cold hill-side,
And in that country coals are dear,
For they come far by wind and tide.

But alas! for consistency and for theories, in 1820 this stanza was suppressed and a genuine touch of poetic reminiscence was substituted :—

Remote from sheltered village-green,
On a hill's northern side she dwelt,
Where from sea-blasts the hawthorns lean,
And hoary dews are slow to melt.

It is not to be believed that Racedown, its aspects, its prospects, or “the pleasant walks” in its neighbourhood made no impression on Wordsworth, or that he despised the South, but his mind was preoccupied with the greater memories of his youth. He had been born “among the mountains,” and there was nothing like or second to their revelation of the mystery and majesty of Nature.

In July 1797 the Wordsworths paid Coleridge a return visit, and whilst they were staying at his cottage at Nether Stowey, in the course of a “wander by themselves,” they found out “a sequestered waterfall in a dell formed by steep hills, covered with full-grown timber trees.” They were enchanted with the spot, and amused themselves with some dreams of happiness which might be realised in a cottage near the dell and within reach of the “society of Coleridge.” As luck would have it, the manor-house of Alfoxden, a quarter of

a mile from the dell, was vacant, and, apparently without returning to bid farewell to Racedown, they moved from the cottage to "a large mansion, in a large park, with seventy head of deer around us."

From Stowey the road winds uphill for two miles or more, till you reach a broken common at the foot of a steep grassy enclosure. Here are two or three cottages (in one of them lived the old huntsman "Simon Lee") enclosed in tiny gardens crowded with fruit-trees. A dark wood borders the common, and, close to the cottages, is an entrance gate to a gentleman's seat or place. Go through the gate—there is a right-of-way, a right of human as well as divine law—and you will find yourself in a long winding drive, with huge holly and beech-trees on either hand. A quarter of a mile of dark wood and you emerge into a park—a park, not a big field, though its size is small in comparison with the featureless prairies of modern farming. On the left the bracken-clad slope stretches up into the Quantocks, and to the right there is the great inland sea—the Bristol Channel—with the Welsh mountains in the distance. The manor-house itself—now double in size to what it was in Wordsworth's day,—is a many-windowed, green-slatted mansion, not unlike Kensington Palace on a small scale. Beyond the manor-house and up and beyond towards the hills is a long row of magnificent beeches, on one of which Wordsworth is said to have carved his name. In his opening lines to *The Excursion* Wordsworth proclaims, perhaps a

little sententiously, "How exquisitely the individual
Mind

To the external World
Is fitted :—and how exquisitely, too—
The external World is fitted to the Mind !

Well, it would be true to say of Alfoxden that the hand of man has been guided by Nature, and that Nature has blessed the handiwork of man. "The house," wrote Dorothy, "is a large mansion, with furniture enough for a dozen families like ours. . . . The garden is at the end of the house, and our favourite parlour, as at Racedown, looks that way. In front is a little court, with grass-plat, gravel walk, and shrubs; the moss roses were in a full beauty a month ago." Now it was in front of Alfoxden, in the road between Stowey and Alfoxden, in the grove or groves of Alfoxden, that most of the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 were composed, and yet these experiments in verse, with their appeal from art to nature, present but few pictures of the poet's home or of his wanderings in the neighbourhood. They breathe the air of the country, but not of the particular county in which they were composed. But though he was singing in a strange land, he does occasionally take note of the trees which were therein. For instance, *A Whirl-Blast from behind the Hill*, in the "language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society" (Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798), may be described as a "snap-shot" of a hailstorm in an undergrove of hollies :—

But see! where'er the hailstones drop,
 The withered leaves all skip and hop;
 There's not a breeze—no breath of air—
 Yet here, and there, and everywhere
 Along the floor, beneath the shade
 By those embowering hollies made,
 The leaves in myriads jump and spring.

The “aged thorn”—a mass of knotted joints, “A wretched thing forlorn”—grew on Quantock's edge, and the “little muddy pond,” which measured “three feet long and two feet wide,” was somewhere “Crookham (*i.e.* Crowcombe) way,” “an impressive object” to one who had eyes to see, and Lyrical Ballads on the stocks; and in the *Lines to my Sister*, which contains a “shorter catechism” of the “Wordsworthian faith and doctrine,”

The red-breast sings from the tall larch
 That stands beside our door.

Forty-three years later, when Wordsworth revisited Alfoxden, the “larch” was *in situ*, but “it had not improved in appearance as to size, nor had it acquired anything of the majesty of age.” Alas, poor larch!

I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
 With coldness still returning!

The aged poet should not have passed judgment on the aged larch.

Finally, in *The Danish Boy*, which glances at the Quantock legend that the clarions of dead Danish warriors sounding their last retreat may still be heard



on still days in summer, there is one perfect picture of Quantock scenery with a *tree* in the foreground :—

Between two sister moorland rills
There is a spot that seems to lie
Sacred to flowerets of the hills
And sacred to the sky.
And in this smooth and open dell
There is a tempest-stricken tree, etc.

Add to these some lines in *A Night Piece* descriptive of “the sky spread over with one continuous cloud, whitened by the light of the moon” (D. Wordsworth’s *Journal*, January 25, 1798), which reappear in *Christabel* :—

The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
It covers but not hides the sky ;

and the mention rather than the description of “Kilve’s smooth shore, by the green sea”—and the list of “images derived from the Nether Stowey environment” (Note to the *Ancient Mariner*, by T. Hutchinson) is well-nigh exhausted.

It was Coleridge who sang of the “hidden brook” and the “never bloomless furze,” of the songs of the nightingales, of the prospect and the main. It was Coleridge, not Wordsworth, who strung the “Harp of Quantock.”

In June 1799 Wordsworth’s lease of Alfoxden expired, and as the fact that his uncle was a Canon of Windsor did not atone for the fact that he was a friend of Coleridge, and an acquaintance of Coleridge’s friend Thelwall, he was turned adrift. Early in July he

started for a walk on the banks of the Wye, and on returning to Bristol he wrote the famous *Lines composed . . . above Tintern Abbey*. It is worth noting that on revisiting the august scenery of "sylvan Wye,"

Those waters rolling from their mountain springs
With a soft inland murmur.
. those steep and lofty cliffs,

he returns to the more immediate service of Nature, and remembers the days that were past :—

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion ; the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite ; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm.

At length (December 20, 1799), after a six months' residence in the imperial city of Goslar, and a prolonged visit to their friends and future connections, the Hutchinsons of Sockburn, on "peninsulatory" Tees, William and Dorothy Wordsworth reached the haven where they would be, the "one cottage" of their hopes and dreams, then and for long afterwards known as Town End, so called because it is the last house on the road from Grasmere to Ambleside. In former days it had been a wayside inn where "the Dove and Olive Bough once hung," and hence some fifty or more years ago it was renamed and misnamed "Dove Cottage"; but to Wordsworth and Coleridge and De Quincey, and

even within my own memory, it was Town End. Name it as you please, it stands at the "bottom of the brow" of White Moss, "a tossed and broken height of knolls of rock and grass and pools," as Mr. Stopford Brooke so well describes it, which all but divides the vale of Grasmere from the vale of Rydal. It looked, but looks no more, across the lake to Silver How and Hammer Scar, and thence, to the right, to Helm Crag and the overlapping folds and ridges of the Easedale Mountains. To the south of the latter stood, and stands, a yew tree, dark against the whitewashed wall, and round the yew tree and "up the side of the wall" grew a honeysuckle. Roses and jasmine made sweet the front of the house, but, before these were fully grown, the green leaves and scarlet flowers of the runner bean were trained on threads for use and "goodly show." It was not a very small cottage after all—"a lowly dwelling," no doubt, but not a labourer's cottage. De Quincey depicts the interior of the cottage as he saw it, for the second time, in October 1807. He is not, perhaps, so minute or so accurate as the *Collegium Criticum* "could have wished," but he is accurate enough:—"We lifted the latch, passed underneath the porch, still covered with wild flowers, . . . and stepped into the little inner vestibule which prefaced the entrance, into what might be considered the principal room of the cottage. It was an oblong square, not above eight and a half feet high, sixteen feet long, and twelve broad, very prettily wain-

scotted with dark polished oak, slightly embellished with carving. One window there was, a perfect and unpretending cottage window, with little diamond panes embowered at almost every season of the year with a profusion of jasmine and other fragrant shrubs." Above this "principal room," and almost of the same size, was Wordsworth's book-room and living-room, where he wrote his poems and received the few guests who came to the cottage. Here (or was it in the room below?) "flapped the flame" of his "half-kitchen, half-parlour fire," and here he would sit without "emotion, hope, or aim," when no guests came and there was no occasion for personal talk. There was a recess in which he kept his books—friends who might talk at will, and he would listen with a ready ear. Adjoining this upper room were Wordsworth's bedroom and a spare room for guests—oftenest, at first, for Coleridge and for Mary and Sarah Hutchinson, and for Captain John Wordsworth—but, afterwards, for such friends of "strength and state" as Walter Scott, and Southey, and Thomas Clarkson, and Sir George and Lady Beaumont. Dorothy's bedroom was below Wordsworth's, on the ground floor. To the east of the house and at the back there was a small garden running up into a hanging orchard. Wordsworth, with a neighbour's help, cut steps in the rocky slope to ease the ascent to a short terrace walk which looked down on the house and commanded a view of the lake and mountains. Above the steps to the right Coleridge discovered a rock seat

“by clearing away the brambles.” Below the terrace walk was a little well :—

Here, thronged with primroses, the steep rock's breast
Glittered at evening like a starry sky ;
And in this bush our sparrow built her nest,
Of which I sang one song that will not die.

A Farewell, ll. 53-56.

It was in the orchard and, afterwards, in a “moss arbour” at one end of the “terrace walk,” “this Bower, this Indian shed, Our own contrivance, Building without peer,” that most of the poems of the first year at Grasmere were composed and written down. One only need be named, “The Cuckoo,” whose “wandering voice” will sound “at once far off and near,” as long as there is any “demand” for poetry. He gave back what he had received, the message from Nature to man ; not hints for the better appreciation of artistic or scenic effects, not a taste or fancy for the “wood and rills,” but a revelation of the things that are not seen, “the *silence* that is in the starry sky, the *sleep* that is among the lonely hills.”

Wordsworth married in 1802, and, as his family increased (three children were born at Town End), he was forced to move into a larger house. Now it chanced that a Liverpool merchant, a Mr. Crump, had “presumed to build a new house for himself upon that beautiful ridge which elbows out into the vale behind the church.” The new house, not yet named Allan Bank, faced both ways towards Grasmere and towards Easedale, and was full in view of “that magnificent

'Temple which doth bound one side of the whole vale," the side which is not visible from Town End. It was a "large house with plenty of room," and before it was finished Wordsworth secured possession, on a six months' agreement. Allan Bank was the first villa residence that "ever burst" into Grasmere. Wordsworth had denounced it as a "temple of abomination," and prophesied that henceforth the vale would lose its "character of simplicity and seclusion." But there is a divinity which shapes our theories by our practical requirements, and poetic or prosaic justice decreed that for three years "this temple of abomination" should be a temple of the Muses. It is here that he wrote the greater part of *The Excursion*, and here where little Catherine—"the only funny child in the family"—was born that he described her "Characteristics," whilst she was yet alive :—

Loving she is, and tractable, though wild :
And Innocence hath privilege in her
To dignify arch looks and laughing eyes ;
And feats of cunning : and the pretty round
Of trespasses, affected to provoke
Mock-chastisement and partnership in play.

And it was here, too, that Coleridge projected a weekly newspaper, that "literary, moral, and political" *Friend*,

Whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love.

Wordsworth's next home (1811-1812) was the old Rectory or parsonage which faced the west end and



tower of Grasmere Church. This was a house of sorrow, for here, in June 1812, he lost his little Catherine, and before the year had closed his third child, Thomas, lay by her side. The daily and hourly sight of their graves was more than his heart could bear, and in March 1813 he removed to Rydal Mount. It was the home of his choice, of his love and of his care, and it remained his home for the rest of his life. Rydal Mount nestles in a tree-clad spur of Nab Scar, a furlong off and above the high-road from Grasmere to Ambleside. Bishop Wordsworth in the *Memoirs* of his uncle has once for all described the house and garden as it was when the poet died in April 1850. "It is a modest mansion of a sober hue, tinged with weather stains, with two tiers of five windows; on the right of these is a porch, and above, and to the right, are two other windows; the highest looks out of what was the Poet's bedroom. . . . The house is mantled over . . . with roses and ivy and jessamine and Virginia creeper." In front of the house there is a "semicircular area or platform of grey 'gravel,' and from this platform a flight of low stone steps descends to the foot of the Mount. Yellow poppies and bright maidenhair, growing where and as they can, make glad this *scala santa*. The Mount itself consists of a turf-clad ring surmounting an outer circle, and marks the site of some prehistoric 'goings on.' Westward of the house are terraces, some 250 feet in length. The upper terrace ends in a small summer-house lined with fir-cones, from which there is, or rather was, before the

further door was removed, a 'surprise view' of Rydal Lake and of Loughrigg Fell. Below the sloping terrace, which is reached by a flight of fourteen steps, and parallel to it, runs a level terrace which was specially constructed for the use of Wordsworth's friend and amanuensis, Mrs. Isabella Fenwick. Beyond the summer-house a 'far terrace,' shaped by the poet and worn by his feet, winds 'in a serpentine line of about 150 feet,' and ends at a little gate, beyond which is a beautiful well of clear water, called 'the Nab Well.'" To the south of the kitchen garden, which lies below the terraces, is "Dora's field." Here was the pollard willow where primroses sheltered a wren's nest, and here is the "elfin pool" where the gold and silver fish, no longer confined to their "glassy cell," enjoyed their liberty. I can recall the terraces, and the summer-house, the platform of grey gravel, the yellow poppies which "flattered" the broad stone steps and the "fairy mound" when I visited Rydal Mount in 1852 and 1853. I can testify that they were in their place—that "they kept the same," a few months ago. "I have heard the hearers say" that Wordsworth went "sounding on his way"—murmuring or booming his verses as he paced up and down the level terrace, and I have heard the "wild-eyed" Dorothy recite her own beautiful lines:—

The worship of this Sabbath morn,
How sweetly it begins!
With the full choral hymn of birds
Mingles no sad lament for sins.

I cannot recall her features, but I have never forgotten the sound of her deep-toned impassioned voice.

“Turn wheresoe’er we may,” to the tall ash tree in the garden, to the laburnum in which the osier cage of the doves was hung, or to the “Rydalian laurels” which overhang the upper terrace, there is some tender association with the memory of the great poet “who gave us nobler loves and nobler cares.” Town End, or, if so it must be, “Dove Cottage,” is held in trust for the nation. Year by year the number of visitors increases. Rydal Mount is not shown to the public, but its inhabitants bear the poet’s name, and loyally and reverently “keep up the traditions of the place.” Never did poet merit or obtain a fitter or fairer “home” than Rydal Mount.

BYRON

SHELLEY alludes to Byron as "The Pilgrim of Eternity." That he may have been or may be. It is certain that, whilst he was a Pilgrim of Time, he had no abiding-place; that he lived or lodged in so many houses that Time would fail to read the reckoning. I cannot pretend, in his own words, to have "turned to pilgrim" to more than one of these spots, and of the residue I can only speak at second-hand.

George Gordon Byron was born, on January 23, 1782, in the back drawing-room of the first floor of No. 16 Holles Street, Cavendish Square. It was afterwards numbered 24, and is now destroyed. Only the site remains. Byron passed his childhood in a "shabby Scotch flat" in Aberdeen—at first in Queen Street, then in Virginia Street, then in Broad Street. Here are shrines enough for a conscientious pilgrim. Some one told Moore that Mrs. Byron and her "wee Geordie" lodged at one end of Queen Street, and her husband, who was not an exemplary character, at the other. On one occasion, by request, the child passed the night with its fond father. This happened "but once only."

Captain Byron had seen quite enough of his young visitor. There is a picture of Byron *act.* seven, a ringleted wax figure, dressed up as an archer. He appears in better guise as “the little boy in a red jacket and nankeen trousers.” Now he is being turned out of the courtyard of the Grammar School; and now he is slowly hastening to the Plain Stanes, to unpack his heart to his cousin Mary Duff; and now, in defiance of the adage, he is peering over “Balgounie’s brig’s black wall” into “the black, deep, salmon stream below.” The only son of Mrs. Byron, he could not forget he was “a mear’s ae foal”! But it was in the summer holidays at a farmhouse at Ballaterich that he began, in heart and soul, to be a poet. It was here that he learned to swim in “the billows of Dee’s rushing tide”; and there that he “climbed very well—though he had a limp . . . by the footpath of Loch-an-euan” to the top of “dark Loch-na-gar.” Here, too, there was a Mary—Mary Robertson—descended, so it is said, from a Lord of the Isles. Gentle or simple, she died “at Aberdeen, March 2, 1867, aged eighty-five years,” and she must have been a big girl of fourteen or fifteen when Byron was nine and a half, and “loved her—even so.” But while Marys, “Highland” or otherwise, came and went, his love for Highland scenery was an abiding passion. For *pièces justificatives* see *The Island* (Canto ii. ll. 280-291), which was written at Genoa in 1823, and the accompanying footnote:—

He who first met the Highlands' swelling blue
 Will love each peak that shows a kindred hue,
 Hail in each crag a friend's familiar face,
 And clasp the mountain in his Mind's embrace.
 Long have I roamed through lands which are not mine,
 Adored the Alp, and loved the Apennine,
 Revered Parnassus, and beheld the steep
 Jove's Ida and Olympus crown the deep :
 But 'twas not all long ages' lore, nor all
Their nature held me in their thrilling thrall ;
 The infant rapture still survived the boy,
 And Loch-na-gar with Ida looked o'er Troy,
 Mixed Celtic memories with the Phrygian mount,
 And Highland linns with Castalie's clear fount.
 Forgive me, Homer's universal shade !
 Forgive me, Phœbus ! that my fancy strayed ;
 The North and Nature taught me to adore
 Your scenes sublime, from those beloved before.

Note.—When very young, about eight years of age . . . I was removed . . . into the Highlands. Here I passed . . . some summers, and from this period I date my love of mountainous countries. I can never forget the effect, a few years afterwards, in England . . . of a mountain, in the Malvern Hills. After I returned to Cheltenham, I used to watch them every afternoon, at sunset, with a sensation which I cannot describe.

When he was ten years old, Byron succeeded to his great-uncle's title and estates. Moore tells a story that the first time the little boy in the red jacket heard his name called out at school as "Dominus" Byron, he "stood silent amid the general shout of his schoolfellows, and at last burst into tears." Was he gifted with second sight, and did "all things reel around him" as they reeled long afterwards when he stood "before an altar"? A month or two later his mother quitted



Scotland for ever, and, with her “ae son” and his nurse May Grey, travelled south to Newstead Abbey. We have no record of his first impressions when he drove past the lake and the cascade, and looked for the first time at the fountain which stood in front of the Abbey, and the “grand arch,” the mighty window of the west front of the Priory Church. Children take most things for granted, but the “change from a shabby Scotch flat to a palace” was of a kind to excite the dulllest and least emotional of “human boys”; and that Byron was unemotional is a point “unseized by the Germans yet.” It was, no doubt, a moment of triumph, but it was soon over. In a few days or a few weeks he was despatched with his nurse into lodgings in the house of one Gill, who lived in St. James’ Lane, Nottingham, and here he composed his first poem or satire on an elderly lady who had incurred his displeasure :—

In Nottingham county there lives at Swan Green
As curst an old lady as ever was seen ;
And when she does die,—which I hope will be soon,—
She firmly believes she will go to the moon.

Moore somewhat unkindly thought that it was “possible these rhymes may have been caught up at second-hand.” Whoever “caught them up” did not catch them up securely. Swan Green is a bowdlerised form of “Swine Green,” which is or was some kind of place or area about a quarter of a mile to the east of St. James’ Lane. I am firmly convinced that Byron had

excellent reasons for disliking this old lady, and expressed himself as unpleasantly as he could. Some of his later poems are satirical.

In the following autumn his mother, acting upon the advice of her lawyers, sent him to Dr. Glennie's Academy at Dulwich, then a private school of some importance. Dulwich Grove stood on the west side of Lordship Lane, and opposite the wooded footway leading to the summit of Sydenham Hill. It was a three-storied suburban villa with a projecting bay, and with what Byron would have called a "balcony" in front. Originally the "Dulwich Green Manor," it had been rebuilt as a temporary residence for Lord Thurlow, and when that very outspoken personage had done with it, it was let or sold to Dr. Glennie. Some years after Moore had begun his life of Byron the Doctor died, the school was broken up, and the house pulled down. The Grove Hotel, familiarly known as "Bew's Corner," now occupies part of the site.

It was whilst he was at Dulwich that Byron made "a first dash into poetry"—"the ebullition of a passion" for his cousin Margaret Parker. The verses perished, but twenty years after he remembered and recalled that "most beautiful of evanescent beings"—"her dark eyes—her long eyelashes! her completely Greek cast of face and figure." Again we can picture him, a heavily-built lad, with "a Greek cast of face," though not of figure, breaking away from those "athletic exercises" (cricket, as one might say) in

which Moore says he determined to excel, to dream and sigh, and mouth his verses to himself. The "suburb lane" (see Browning's *Confessions*) which bordered the garden of Dulwich Grove and its playing-ground and orchard must often have listened to the same sound, when Robert Browning of Camberwell, and, again, when John Ruskin of Herne Hill passed that way. If, as Byron believed, places have spirits, there must have been some communication and interchange of the "bodiless thought,"

Whose half-beholdings through unsteady tears
Gave shape, hue, distance to the inward dream.

S. T. C.

Byron's next home (1801-1805), and it was, perhaps, the happiest home he ever knew, was Dr. Drury's house at Harrow-on-the-Hill. His early poems are full of allusions to Harrow, dignified or disguised as Ida. He tells us he would "recline" for hours on a tombstone in Harrow churchyard, and there Tradition, who is partial to tombstones, has "let him lay"! But he also tells us that he would wander round—it is not far to wander—the "steep brow of the churchyard," which looks towards Windsor, to watch the sunset; but Tradition, unmindful of sunsets, is silent. Forgotten, too, if ever remembered, is his one allusion to the plain or valley of the Brent, which lies below the wooded hill of Ida. "But these," as he tells us in *Childish Recollections*, ll. 133-136 (and "these" are they who have shirked fielding at cricket):—

But these with slower steps direct their way,
Where Brent's cool waves in limpid currents stray;
While yonder few search out some cool retreat,
And arbours shade them from the summer's heat.

It is a pretty picture, but Art and Nature are at strife. The Brent, like Byron, is a "child of clay," and could not have run "in limpid currents" a hundred or a thousand years ago. Alders and hawthorn meet across its crumbling mudbanks, and the kingfisher flits and gleams beneath the overhanging branches. The Brent has its charms, and merits the sacred bard, but its waters, whether they glide or creep or swirl, are not limpid save by poetic courtesy. Byron belongs to Harrow. He carved the letters of his name on the walls of one of the class-rooms, where they remain unto this day. He is the patron saint, or watery god, of Duck Pool, the "Ducker" of a generation that "takes up" but does not read *Childe Harold*. But the scenery of Middlesex did not and could not mould or sway the fashioning of his verse. When he turned for a last look at the verdant hill, "its spire was seen through a tear"; and at the close of his life he selected a spot in Harrow for the last resting-place of his five-year-old Allegra, "sole daughter" of an exile's hearth.

In October 1805 Byron went into residence at Trinity College, Cambridge. His rooms were in Neville's Court, and, the legend notwithstanding, he was their sole tenant. His Lordship's bear "kept" out of college, at a livery stable, perhaps at Fordham's

news. So, at least, I was informed by the son of a contemporary and eye-witness, who more than once "saw plain" both Byron and the bear. Cambridge suggested rather than inspired some dreary stanzas entitled *Granta, A Medley*, and some lines in *Hints from Horace*, but said nothing that was good or beautiful to Byron. The best use which he made of his time was "to dive for and pick up plates, eggs, and even shillings." "I remember," he says, ". . . there was a stump of a tree in the bed of the river in a spot round which I used to cling, and 'wonder how the devil I came there.'" The spot, a bend of the Cam, is still known as Byron's Pool. One year, 1807, he cut all his terms and passed his time in lodgings in London, or at his mother's house at Southwell. Burgage Manor, which looks on Southwell Green, is an old-fashioned villa, not to say mansion, with a portico in front. It has an air of dignified comfort and unimpeachable gentility. Byron found it dull, and it was partly for this reason that whilst he was at Southwell he collected his poems, wrote fresh ones, and sent them to Newark to be printed.

His first venture was a small quarto which he named *Fugitive Pieces*. The title is ominous, for the little volume contained one poem too many, and, with the exception of two or three copies, the entire issue was committed to the flames. *Poems on Various Occasions* sprang as it were from the ashes of *Fugitive Pieces*, and as many praised and no one wanted to burn

them, he boldly "commenced author," and published *Hours of Idleness*. In whatever ways those hours were spent, it was not in the presence or service of Nature. Of Mrs. Byron's scandal-loving neighbours, of their daughters, or, possibly, their maid-servants, Emmas, and Lesbias, and Carolines, we hear enough and too much; but to Southwell itself, a pleasant place "on a rising ground in the midst of an amphitheatre of hills," he alludes but once, in a single stanza of the *Adieu*, a poem "written under the impression the author would soon die":—

Fields, which surround yon rustic cot,
 While yet I linger here,
 Adieu! you are not now forgot,
 To retrospection dear.
 Streamlet! along whose rippling surge
 My youthful limbs were wont to urge,
 At noontide heat, their pliant course;
 Plunging with ardour from the shore,
 Thy springs will lave these limbs no more,
 Deprived of active force.

The "rustic cot" may possibly have been Mrs. Pigot's cottage, as I have elsewhere maintained, but it could not have been Mrs. Pigot's house on Southwell Green, which was not a "cot" or by any means rustic. It is a deal likelier that Emma or Caroline, or a rustic Mary, grew beside that door.

In April 1808, before he had attained his majority, he regained possession of Newstead Abbey, and in the following autumn he went into residence. He



must have been familiar with every nook and corner of his heritage, for he had often stayed at Newstead as the guest of his tenant, Lord Grey de Ruthyn ; but at last he had come to his own, a poor thing, and yet a great thing, and his very own. Ten years had elapsed since his predecessor, the “ Wicked Lord,” had breathed his last in the Prior’s Lodgings, the one set of apartments which time and the weather and the bailiffs had left habitable. The first stanza of one of his first poems (1803), printed on the first page of *Fugitive Pieces*—“ On leaving N-st-d ”—is a lamentation over fallen greatness :—

Through the cracks in those battlements loud the winds whistle,
For the hall of my fathers is gone to decay ;
And in yon once gay garden the hemlock and thistle
Have chok’d up the rose, which once bloomed in the way.

Again, in the *Elegy on Newstead Abbey*, which was written three years later, in 1806, he apostrophised the “ hall of his fathers ” as “ Newstead’s fast falling, once resplendent dome ! ” The “ holy and beautiful house,” which the Black Canons had dedicated to God and the Virgin, which his ancestor “ little Sir John Byron with the great Beard ” and his descendants had converted into a baronial mansion, was a dwelling-place for the owls and the bats. Something must have been done to make it habitable, or it could not have been let, and well let (1803-1808), as a shooting-box to Lord Grey de Ruthyn, but when it was handed over to Byron, he was forced to spend more money than he could afford

in repairing and re-furnishing some of the smaller rooms for himself and his mother. A year later, when Childe Harold and his "fellow Bacchanals" masqueraded as Abbot and monks, and skylarked and "buffooned all round the house," neglect and decay still reigned supreme. The glory had departed, only the majesty and beauty remained.

Newstead Abbey was built in the form of a hollow square. Flanking the hollow are cloisters supporting, on three sides, a range of corridors, once the cells of the monks, and on the fourth side is a library built or re-built in the sixteenth century. The hollow, or inner square, is a grassy quadrangle, and in the centre of the quadrangle stands a Gothic fountain, with a double ring or frill of gargoyles. If you stand by the fountain to examine the gargoyles, you look up to the windows of the corridors and library, and above the north-west corner of the cloisters you catch sight of the gable and crockets of the west front of the Priory Chapel. In Byron's day the fountain stood in front of the house, but Colonel Wildman, who purchased the Abbey in 1817, restored it to its proper place, and Byron, in *Don Juan* (Canto xiii. St. lxxv., February 1820) writes accordingly:—

Amidst the court a Gothic fountain played,
Symmetrical, but decked with carvings quaint—
Strange faces, like to men in masquerade,
And here perhaps a monster, there a saint.

Byron must have loved those gargoyles, and, it may be,

made "strange faces" like them for his own and his friends' amusement.

The ground floor of the west front of the Abbey—which is the front of the house—consists of an entrance hall, approached by a flight of stone steps, and a vaulted chamber known as the Monks' Parlour. Above are the Guests' Refectory, or Banqueting Hall, and an inner room where the Prior dined by himself, or entertained his royal guests. A corkscrew staircase ascends from the level of the Prior's Parlour to these upper rooms above, which Byron furnished for his own use—a bedroom and a dressing-room and a room for his page-in-waiting.

These rooms are unchanged. The four-post bedstead, the four corners decorated with a baron's coronet, is hung with its original Chinese-pattern chintz curtains. The washstand still holds the Byronic jugs and basins. The chests of drawers with "elliptic fronts" are of the finest Spanish mahogany. Lovers of old furniture would count them precious apart from their associations. Portraits of Joe Murray, an old retainer of the old Lord's, of Gentleman Jackson, his "corporeal pastor and master," and a set of coloured engravings of Harrow and Cambridge still hang on the walls. Here or nowhere is a poet's home. The windows of the bedroom look west, and command a view of "the lucid lake" and the "deep cascade." How often must he have looked out from these windows, when the lake was a sheet of silver "in the noontide of the moon";

or, when the wind was "winged from one point of heaven," have listened to that dolorous wail, "the dying accent driven through the huge Arch!"

Here, too, or hereabouts, in one of these three rooms, or to and fro between the great dining-hall and the Prior's Parlour, was the chosen haunt of the Black Friar who did *not* appear to Don Juan. And still he walks, if of late years the electric light has not put him out. Touch a button and you lay a ghost!

On the farther side of the quadrangle facing the east are the Prior's Lodgings, the Orangery, once the Chapter-House, and the "slype" or passage between church and Chapter-House (Byron calls it the "exquisite small chapel"), and, above, in the upper story, range the state bedrooms, named after their royal occupants, Edward III., Henry VII., and Charles II. The Prior and Canons held their land on condition that the King could command free quarters at the Abbey, and it is said the right is still in force. Fronting the south is the Xenodochium, or Guesten Hall, and, above, the Guests' Refectory, now the Grand Drawing-Room. On the north side, below, are cloisters, and, above, the Library. These chambers and halls and galleries make up the square block of monastic buildings, and, in Byron's phrase, "for all the rest *vide* Guidebook." But the main feature of the exterior of the Abbey which distinguishes it from other great houses or palaces, save, perhaps, Holyrood, is the west front of the Priory Church, which is flush with the west front of the

mansion. It is a stone screen, that and nothing more, for aisles and chancel have been laid low even to the ground; but, in itself, it is perfect and "beautiful exceedingly." Save for the hollow arch, a "mighty window," shorn of its tracery, and for a row of six lancet windows above, the wall is solid. On either side of the arch are "two blank windows overlaid with delicate Gothic mouldings carved in relief on the solid ashlar," and, at either extremity of the front, are buttresses with canopied niches, which once contained the statues of apostles or saints. Over the west door is a much-worn figure of the Saviour, and, high above the lancet windows, is a statuette of the Crowned Virgin, with the Babe in her arms, which, as it were by a miracle, escaped the shot and cannon-balls of Cromwell's troops. Byron half believed that it *was* a miracle :—

But in a higher niche, alone, but crowned,
The Virgin-Mother of the God-born Child,
With her Son in her blessèd arms, looked round,
Spared by some chance where all beside was spoiled.

Behind the ivied screen is a sward of close-mown grass, and at the eastern extremity, where once the High Altar stood, is the urn-crowned sepulchral monument of Byron's dog "Boatswain." It bears the well-known "Inscription to a Newfoundland Dog." When his mother died in August 1811, he made a will and left directions that his body was to be buried in the vault beneath this monument, and that his dog was

“not to be removed from the said vault.” But the only persons or things which lie buried at Newstead are the monks and Boatswain, and, somewhere, in some secret place, the famous “cup formed from a skull”!

The Abbey lies in the midst of a fair domain. The grant of lands which Henry II. assigned to the Black Canons, the *Novus Locus* or New Stede, or station, embraced the upper waters of the Leem, which rises in Sherwood Forest and falls into the Trent at Nottingham. To work their mills and to turn marsh-land into pasturage the monks dammed the stream and constructed a chain of lakes. One of the lakes, Byron’s “lucid lake,” lies above the Abbey, to the north-west. The “cascade” flows over and under a sluice of stone-work into the second lake, which borders the garden and runs almost parallel with the south front of the Abbey. The oak tree which Byron planted in 1806 stands about half-way between the edge of this lake and the house. A third lake lies about half a mile to the south-east. It is surrounded with woods and overlooked by a cairn of huge boulders of plum-pudding stone. There is a tale that the “wicked Lord” built the cairn of malice prepense, “expecting and hoping” that a day would come when he would open the sluice-gates, mount his *belvidere* and watch the devastation as the waters deluged the country-side. It is an eerie spot, haunted by the shapes and shadows of “old unhappy far-off things.” If Byron



wandered by that "lonely tide," or climbed the evil-looking watch-tower, he kept his thoughts to himself. It may be that before the trees were planted on the margin of the lake there was no cover for "light-loathing demons," or for pheasants.

At a half right angle to the chain of lakes there is a chain of ponds—Forest Pond to the north of the Priory Church, the square "Eagle" Pond, and the Monks' stew-pond, bordered with immemorial yews, which stretch from side to side, and leave but a narrow strip of sullen water for "the full-orbed moon" to turn into a line of light when she pierces the impending branches. Close by is St. Mary's well, a jet of water which shoots out its "tiny cone of sand" with "soundless dance." It is hardly worth while to labour the point that Newstead Abbey is a romantic spot, and that Byron was a romantic poet, or, as Goethe would have it, the Spirit of Romance incarnate.

In the late autumn of 1814 Byron paid his last visit to Newstead, and in the spring of 1816 he left England for the Continent. He had but eight years to live, and during those eight years he was master or tenant of at least eight dwelling-places. But their reckoning and presentment are "matter for another tale." Home he had none. Driven by pressure from without or by inward restlessness he passed from land to land, from city to city, still leaving behind him the tradition and memories of his sojourn. He had been, as he afterwards professed, a lover of mountains from his child-

hood. "Chimariot's dusky amphitheatre," and Mount Tomaros, Parnassus, and Ida, had brought back the sacred memories of Colbleen and of Loch-na-gar; and now, in the first months of his life-long exile, he lifted up his eyes to the majesty and glory of Nature, in the vain hope that he might forget himself and find an antidote to remorse. It is true that Shelley "dosed" Byron with Wordsworth, and that the latter half of the Third Canto of *Childe Harold*, the first two Acts of *Manfred* and the *Prisoner of Chillon*, and the Chillon Poems, which were written during a four months' residence at the Villa Diodati, on the southern shore of the Lake of Geneva, bear traces of a vicarious inspiration. It is true that, here and there, in the turn of a phrase, and, more than this, in the formal recitation of a kind of natural creed, Byron shows that he had come under a new influence which he could not resist; but the result, the Nature-poetry which was the outcome of this strange alliance or discipleship, was a new development. Take, for instance, the famous Wordsworthian stanza (lxxii.) of the Third Canto of *Childe Harold*:—

I live not in myself, but I become
 Portion of that around me; and to me
 High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
 Of human cities torture: I can see
 Nothing to loathe in Nature, save to be
 A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
 Classed among creatures, when the soul can flee,
 And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
 Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.

Or take this record of a poetic childhood (*Manfred*, Act II. Scene ii. ll. 62-73):—

My joy was in the wilderness,—to breathe
The difficult air of the iced mountain's top,
Where the birds dare not build, nor insect's wing
Flit o'er the herbless granite; or to plunge
Into the torrent, and to roll along
On the swift whirl of the new breaking wave . . .
In these my early strength exulted; or
To follow through the night the moving moon,
The stars and their development; . . .
Or to look, list'ning, on the scatter'd leaves,
While Autumn winds were at their evening song.
These were my pastimes, and to be alone.

Byron turns and returns to Nature, not with a “wise passiveness” to receive what Nature alone can give, and so to understand and love humanity the more, but he flies to her in wrath and anguish, as to a partisan and an ally, a sympathiser in his revolt against the world. Nature stirred him to the depths and awoke the passion which was the “very pulse of the machine,” the life-spring of his poetry. It is seldom that he looks close enough at natural objects to attain to nicety or subtlety of delineation. He is happiest in the description of striking and peculiar effects, such as the Lauterbrunnen “curving over the rock like the tail of a white horse streaming on the wind”; or the glacier, like “a frozen hurricane”; or “whole woods of feathered pines ALL WITHERED”—word-pictures which he noted in his journal and reproduced in *Manfred*; or that “illustra-

tion " of "Nemi navelled in the woody hills," its basin the crater of an extinct volcano :—

The oval mirror of thy glassy lake ;
And calm as cherished hate, its surface wears
A deep cold settled aspect nought can shake,
All coiled into itself and round, as sleeps the snake.

Byron was indeed, as he writes, "a lover of Nature, an admirer of Beauty" in Nature, but, for the most part, it is some great thing which sends him into song, such as the sunset commingling with the moonrise which

Streams along the Alpine heights
Of blue Friuli's mountains,

and deep-dyes the Brenta with "the odorous purple of a new-born rose" ; or the

Sweet hour of twilight !—in the solitude
Of the pine forest, and the silent shore
Which bounds Ravenna's immemorial wood.

Nature speaks to him not always "comfortably," but with an answering echo to the tumult and the passion that were at work within. But he had, too, another "soul side."

Browning says that every artist, painter, or poet seeks to indulge his genius by sometimes going out of himself, by speaking in a language not his own, in the fashion of another art :—

He fain would paint a picture,
Put to proof art alien to the artist.

There is a ballad of the violet which serves as a

BYRON'S "TOMB" AT HARROW

There is a tomb in Harrow Churchyard where Byron
"used to sit for hours and hours when a boy."

Where now alone I muse, who oft have trod,
With those I loved, thy soft and verdant sod.

BYRON.



kind of epilogue to that “*Faustish* kind of drama,” *The Deformed Transformed*, which Byron wrote at Pisa in the early summer of 1822. The violet is of Italian growth, but “her dewy eye of blue” woke memories of “the North and Nature” :—

The spring is come ; the violet's gone,
The first-born child of the early sun :
With us she is but a winter's flower,
The snow on the hills cannot blast her bower,
And she lifts up her dewy eye of blue
To the youngest sky of the self-same hue.

And when the spring comes with her host
Of flowers, that flower beloved the most
Shrinks from the crowd that may confuse
Her heavenly odour and virgin hues.

Pluck the others, but still remember
Their herald out of dim December—
The morning star of all the flowers,
The pledge of daylight's lengthened hours ;
Nor, midst the roses, e'er forget
The virgin, virgin Violet.

S. T. COLERIDGE

1772-1834

COLERIDGE was country-born, but town-bred. Nature in the sense of the country—the country which, according to Varro (*On Things Rustic*) and to Cowper is emphatically if not exclusively divine, affected him with the charm of novelty. He falls in love with it as with something outside himself, which is not familiar to him, and which he does not take for granted as necessarily and *naturally* lovable. In the five-and-twenty poems written at Christ's Hospital, the genuine product of his boyish Muse, there is but one allusion to his birthplace, one single confession of love for or delight in wood or stream or field. He was reared

In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars ;

and from the sky and stars he received the first impulse to translate the language of Nature into the language of Poetry. In the Sonnet *To the Autumnal Moon*, written at the close of his sixteenth year, he paints as vividly and as truthfully as words can paint one of those



moonscapes which swam into his ken, as he lay on "the leaded roof of that wide edifice, his school and home":—

Mild Splendour of the various-vested Night!
 Mother of wildly-working visions! hail!
 I watch thy gliding, while with watery light
 Thy weak eye glimmers through a fleecy veil;
 And when thou lovest thy pale orb to shroud
 Behind the gather'd blackness lost on high;
 And when thou darrest from the wind-rent cloud
 Thy placid lightning o'er the awaken'd sky.

Two years later he addressed a sonnet to "his earliest affection, the evening star." It was written, he tells us, "as I was returning from the New River, and it looked newly-bathed as well as I."

O meek attendant of Sol's setting blaze,
 I hail, sweet Star, thy chaste effulgent glow;
 On thee full oft with fixed eye I gaze,
 Till I, methinks, all spirit seem to grow.

O first and fairest of the starry choir,
 O loveliest 'mid the daughters of the Night, etc.

The passion, the joy in this "thing of beauty" bursts through and escapes from the hackneyed phraseology. He is enamoured less of the "maid I love" than of the "Star benign," which suggests and symbolises her gentle brilliance. Again, in *Genevieve*, written, perhaps, in 1789, he compares the "maiden's eye" to the "star of eve," and in *Lines to a Young Lady*, a Cambridge poem, in dwelling on his "early youth" he tells us that

of Sorrow would I sing.
 Aye as the *star of evening* flung its beam
 In broken radiance on the wavy stream—

the "wavy stream" being the Thames at Greenwich, or as looked down upon from old London Bridge. Nature was his teacher, but it was Nature seated in her heavenly, her "silver chair," not Nature as Village Schoolmistress, who set him his earliest lessons.

His first acquaintance with rustic things is revealed in *Life*, a sonnet written in September 1789, after he had revisited Ottery St. Mary, to take a last farewell of his sister Nancy, who was dying of consumption. On the road homeward to Axminster and London, as he turned off the cross-road from Ottery, he is roused from his melancholy forebodings by the beauty of "the glorious prospect" :—

At every step it widen'd to my sight,
Wood, Meadow, verdant Hill, and dreary Steep,
Following in quick succession of delight,—
Till all—at once—did my eye ravish'd sweep!

This is but a profession, or, rather, an exclamation of delight, an attempt to catalogue the features of the landscape. Afterwards, when many revisitings had blended the newer impressions with the recollections of his childhood, he painted one simple scene, as it fixed itself on the eye of a poet :—

Dear native Brook ! wild streamlet of the West !
How many various-fated years have past,
What happy and what mournful hours, since last
I skimmed the smooth thin stone along thy breast,
Numbering its light leaps ! Yet so deep imprint

Sink the sweet scenes of childhood, that mine eyes
 I never shut amid the sunny ray,
 But straight with all their tints thy waters rise,
 Thy crossing plank, thy marge with willows grey,
 And bedded sand that vein'd with various dyes
 Glean'd through thy bright transparence, etc.

The lines which form part of a *Sonnet to the River Otter* may be assigned to the summer of 1793, but the description of "Otter's sleep-persuading stream," in the *Songs of the Pixies* (1793), is less exact and less original. It is only here and there in the early poems published in 1796 and 1797 that we have "glimpses that would make us less forlorn," of wood or stream, or of the blessed fields. He was a dweller in cities, in London or Cambridge or Bristol, and only now and then on a summer excursion was he face to face with the verities of Nature. For instance, in *Lines composed while climbing the Left Ascent of Brockley Coomb* (May 1795), he breaks with conventional usage and describes not what he ought to have seen, but what he actually saw :—

Up scour the startling stragglers of the flock
 That on green plots o'er precipices browse :
 From the forc'd fissures of the naked rock
 The Yew-tree bursts! Beneath its dark green boughs
 (Mid which the May-thorn blends its blossoms white),
 Where broad smooth stones jut out in mossy seats,
 I rest.

Again, in the lines *On observing a Blossom on the First of February 1796*, his indictment of "This dark, frieze-coated, hoarse, teeth-chattering month" is

engrossed by Nature's pen. The poet was "on tour," soliciting subscriptions for his forthcoming periodical *The Watchman*, and on the top of stage-coaches, and in the dreary streets of Sheffield and of Nottingham, he had "learnt in suffering" how and what to "teach in song"!

The two Clevedon poems, *The Eolian Harp* and *Reflections on having left a Place of Retirement*, "the prologue and epilogue to the honeymoon," bespeak the charms of rural retreat, as well as the fulfillment of domestic bliss. The vignette or aquarelle:—

Our cot, our cot o'ergrown
With white-flowered Jasmin, and the broad-leaved Myrtle;
 . . . the scents
Snatched from yon bean-field! and the world so hush'd!
The stilly murmur of the distant sea;—

or the goodly scenes, the reward of the "perilous toil" of scaling a Somersetshire down:

The bare bleak mountain speckled thin with sheep;
Grey clouds, that shadowing spot the sunny fields;

And seats, and lawns, the abbey and the wood,
And cots, and hamlets, and faint city spire;—

these and other deliberate appreciations of the picturesque betray the strangeness and the astonishment of the discoverer or explorer of the unknown. Bristowa's citizen who "eyed our cottage," or Cottle, when he "rode down to pay his respects to the newly-married couple," would, an they could, have indulged in similar transports. All is true to nature, but the

enumeration of details and the choice of details suggest a certain inexperience of Nature.

A minuter and more intimate appreciation of Nature is displayed in a poem to Charles Lloyd (*To a Young Friend*, etc. [? September 1796]). He pictures himself and his young friend poetising on some "mount," perhaps in Derbyshire, perhaps in dreamland :—

O then 'twere loveliest sympathy, to mark
The berries of the half-uprooted ash
Dripping and bright; and list the torrent's dash,—
Beneath the cypress, or the yew more dark,
Seated at ease, on some smooth mossy rock, etc.

A month or two later, when he had reason to hope that his "crazy ark" would rest on some "Ararat" of Somersetshire, he tells Charles Lloyd's father that the last but not the least of the six companions who would form his society would be "Nature looking at me in a thousand looks of beauty and speaking to me in a thousand melodies of love." He had begun to set his heart upon the country.

On January 1, 1797, Coleridge took up his abode at a little roadside cottage or hovel on the outskirts of the market-village of Nether Stowey in Somersetshire. He dreamt of making a substantial livelihood by "horticulture," that is, by cultivating a small garden plot and orchard which lay at the back of the cottage. In the intervals of gardening he could write for the reviews and fulfil his mission as a poet. The fact that Wordsworth and his sister had settled in a farmhouse

in a remote part of Dorsetshire may perhaps have suggested this escape from the "vast city," but the choice of a cottage in Nether Stowey was determined by the proximity of a "patronal" friend and disciple, Tom Poole. He would rear, or in plain prose *rent*, "a lowly shed,"

Beside one friend,
Beneath the impervious covert of one oak.

Now it was within the four walls of this "lowly shed" that the greater part of his great poems were written, or, at least, written down. A miserable cottage it was, unadorned by myrtle, or "window-peeping rose"; but the garden, which contained a "jasmin harbor," was a pleasant place, from which the grassy ramparts of Stowey Castle and Dousborough's "airy roof" were visible. There was "a sweet sequestered orchard plot" where the poet and his wife could sit and watch the apple blossoms

Stirred by the faint gale of departing May,
Send their loose blossoms slanting o'er our heads!

In July 1797 Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy settled at Alfoxden, a small country seat some three miles distant from Stowey, which was let furnished for twenty-three pounds a year, including rent and taxes. The manor-house is built on a spur of the Quantocks, in the midst of a small deer park. The front looks to the south, "but it is screened from the sun by a high hill. . . . This hill is . . . scattered irregularly . . . with trees and topped with fern. . . . Wherever we turn we have woods, smooth downs, and

valleys with small brooks running from them . . . the hills that cradle these valleys are either covered with fern and bilberries or oak woods." From the drive or avenue which runs through a wood to the park and house you catch sight of the "shadowy main dim-tinted," the "dun waters of the Severn sea" bounded by the "pale outline of the Welsh mountains."

The first-fruits of this second withdrawal to a "place of retirement" was the tragedy of *Osorio*, the first draft of *Remorse*, which was begun in the spring of 1797, before Wordsworth came to Alfoxden, and finished by the middle of October. It is to be noted that as the drama proceeds there is an increasing tendency to heighten the passion by an appeal to Nature. Take, for instance, this confession of "natural" piety:—

O . . . that they could return,
Those blessed days, that imitated heaven,
When we two wont to walk at eventide;
When we saw nought but beauty; when we heard
The voice of that Almighty One, who lov'd us,
In every gale that breath'd, and wave that murmur'd!

Act iv. ii. 287-292.

Or this profession of "natural" faith:—

With other ministrations thou, O Nature!
Healest thy wandering and distemper'd child!
Thou pourest on him thy soft influences,
Thy sunny hues, fair forms, and breathing sweets;
Thy melodies of woods, and winds, and waters!
Till he relent, and can no more endure
To be a jarring and a dissonant thing
Amid this general dance and minstrelsy.

Act v. ii. 126-133.

Or take this study in autumn foliage. The poet forgets that the scene is laid on the coast of Granada, and paints instead a Somersetshire coomb when autumn had begun to lay "a fiery finger on the leaves":—

The hanging woods, that touch'd by autumn seem'd
As they were blossoming hues of fire and gold,
The hanging woods, most lovely in decay.

Act v. i. 39-41.

Two or three months before these last Acts of *Osorio* were written, in the lines entitled *This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison*, which may be regarded as the prelude to a fuller inspiration, he had given proof both of the will and the power to come to close quarters with Nature. Debarred from accompanying his friends the Wordsworths and Charles Lamb in their ramble "on springy heath along the hill-top ledge," he is fain to content himself with the humbler beauties of "the little lime-tree bower," Tom Poole's garden:—

Pale beneath the blaze
Hung the transparent foliage; and I watched
Some broad and sunny leaf, and loved to see
The shadow of the leaf and stem above,
Dappling its sunshine.

If this attitude of heart and soul toward Nature had been quickened and stimulated by Wordsworth, it was Wordsworth who diverted Coleridge from the seen to the unseen, from "this fair earth and its divinities" to the "goings on" of those "invisible natures" which live and move behind the veil of the senses. Following metaphorically and following literally in Wordsworth's



footsteps, he had begun to "make studies" for a poem to be named *The Brook*. "I sought for a subject," he says, "that should give equal room and freedom for description, incident, and impassioned reflections on men, nature, and society. . . . Such a subject I conceived myself to have found in a stream, traced from its source in the hills among the yellow-red moss and conical glass-shaped tufts of bent to the first break or fall, where its drops become audible, and it begins to form a channel, . . . but circumstances, evil and good, interfered to prevent the completion of the poem" (*Biographia Literaria*, chap. x.). One circumstance may have been Wordsworth's conviction that the proper sphere of his friend's genius was "the supernatural," and that he would be tempted to substitute a minute and elaborate tabulation of scenic effects for the creative work of the imagination. The "Time and Place" of the great Stowey poem, *The Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, and *Kubla Khan* are "not from hence," and only here and there and incidentally does the inspired fabulist betray the immediate source of his word-pictures. One or two instances must suffice.

The hidden brook

That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune

flowed and still flows through Holford Wood, which is close to Alfoxden. "The moss that wholly hides the old oak stump"; the

Brown skeletons of leaves that lag
My forest-brook along,

and the "Ivy-tod that is heavy with snow" were familiar objects of his rambles among the "sloping coombes of Quantock" during the late spring of 1798. In the First Part of *Christabel* there are several of these "studies" or etchings of the sky by night and of woodland or roadside scenery. There is, for instance, "the thin grey cloud that covered but not hid the sky," the round full moon which looked "both small and dull," and the "one red leaf—the last of its clan," which danced like a thing of life, as it was blown hither and thither by the wind. Are not these things written in Dorothy Wordsworth's Alfoxden Journal—a proof, if proof were needed, that she "gave eyes" alike to her brother and her brother's friend? Still more unmistakable traces of Quantock scenery may be found in the "meditative" pieces of 1798, *Fears in Solitude*, and in *The Nightingale*. Even in *France: an Ode*, there is a further allusion to the "hanging woods" "midway the perilous slope inclined," and in the final apostrophe to Liberty he dwells fondly on

that sea-cliff's verge,
Whose pines, scarce travelled by the breeze above,
Had made one murmur with the distant surge.

Now we know that Wordsworth and Coleridge lived at the foot of wooded hills and were within easy reach of "Kilve's delightful shore," and that day in and day out they would climb by wooded ways to

the ridge of the Quantocks or descend to "a favourite seat behind the bank on the seaside." Poetry does not depend on these "accidents"—it is born of the spirit : but the perception and recognition of its accidents make for the understanding and realisation of poetry.

In the autumn of 1798 Coleridge went to Germany, and for the space of two years he wrote but little original poetry. Of his ten months' sojourn in Germany the sole poetical record consists of a description of the scenery of the Hartz Forest, which forms part of *Lines written in the Album at Elbingerode* :

Heavily my way
Downward I dragged through fir-groves evermore,
Where bright green moss heaves in sepulchral forms
Speckled with sunshine ; and, but seldom heard,
The sweet bird's song became an hollow sound ;
And the breeze murmuring indivisibly
Preserved its solemn murmur most distinct
From many a note of many a waterfall,
And the brook's chatter ; 'mid whose islet-stones
The dingy kidling with its tinkling bell
Leaped frolicsome, or old romantic goat
Sat, his white beard slow waving.

A mountain excursion had roused the slumbering passion of his Muse.

The second period of Coleridge's poetical career begins with the composition of the Second Part of *Christabel* (September 1800), and ends with that cry of despair, *The Pains of Sleep* (September 1803). Then, if ever, he was a *Lake Poet*. Of the second vintage there was but a scanty yield, and the fruit of

the vine but seldom favours or betrays the soil and aspect of the vineyard. In the Second Part of *Christabel* the place names, Windermere and Dungeon Ghyll and Borrowdale, give evidence of new surroundings, and towards the close of *The Picture*; or, *The Lover's Resolution* (1802), there is a finished "study" of a "circular vale . . . land-locked," which is certainly somewhere in Westmoreland or Cumberland, and may possibly have been suggested by Watendlath. In the *Keepsake* (1800) the "tedded hay and corn-sheaves in one field" and an autumnal foxglove are characteristic of the Lake Country, and in *A Strange Minstrel*, in *The Knights' Tomb*, and in the *Thought suggested by a View of Saddleback*—

On stern Blencartha's perilous height
The winds are tyrannous and strong,—

the verse, in Byron's phrase, is "a breather of the mountain-tops." But, for the most part, in what he says and leaves unsaid he confirms the truth of his own confession, in *Dejection: an Ode*:—

I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

"Joy" which had wedded Nature to him had gone beyond recall, and his marriage portion, "A new Earth and a new Heaven," had been taken from him and given to another. But once, and that once by the aid of borrowed plumage, does his wing take flight. The *Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni* is in

part, perhaps a quarter of the whole, a translation from the German of Friederike Brun, but the remaining lines, which purport to be descriptive of Alpine scenery, were inspired by a solitary walk on Sca Fell. The critics, noticing the plagiarism and misliking the reiterated invocation of the Deity,

God! let the torrents, like a shout of nations,
Answer! and let the ice-plains echo, God!

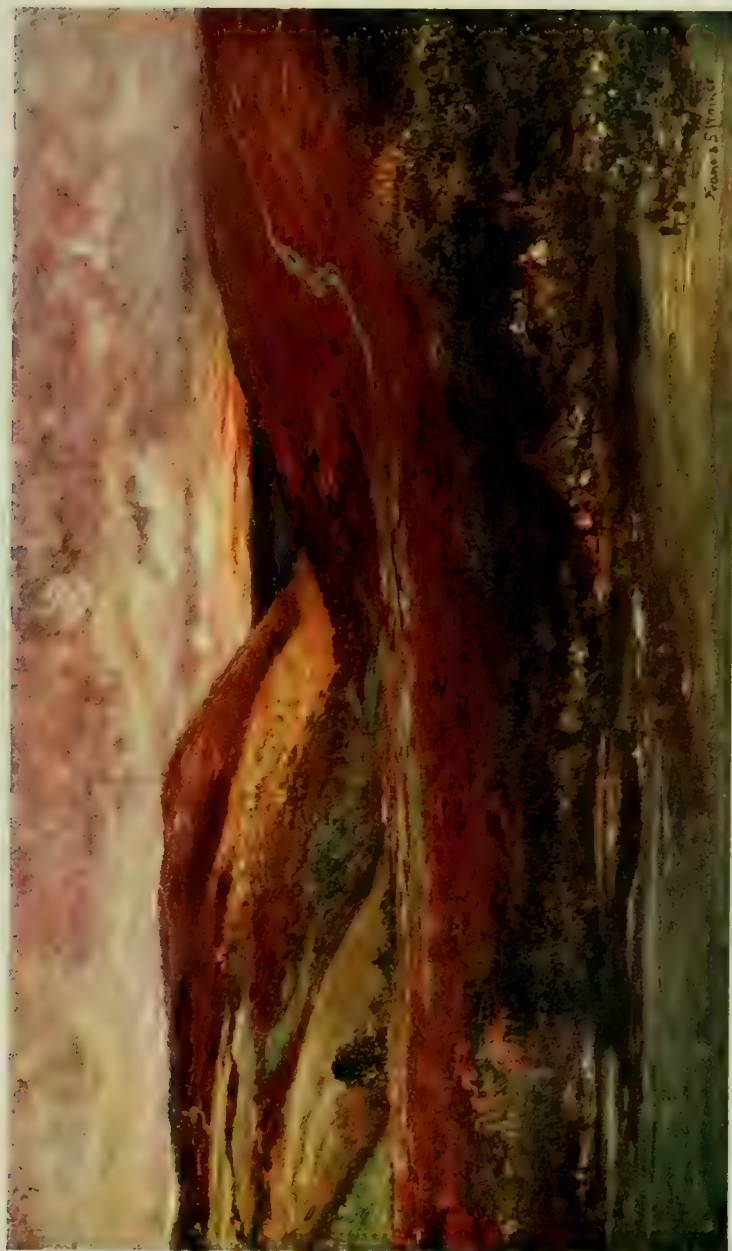
have written down this triumphant hymn of praise as pompous and artificial. Whether it be pompous or no is a question of taste, but that it was a genuine and spontaneous outburst of poetic enthusiasm may be demonstrated by a study of contemporary letters and journals. As he was brought for the first time face to face with the majesty of Nature, "his heart grew hot within him, the fire kindled, and he spake with his tongue."

But little as Coleridge merited the disgrace or deserved the honour of being nicknamed a Lakist, it was not from want of physical activity or from any failure to perceive the charms and wonders of mountain scenery that his Muse was silent. Notebook in hand he wandered far and near over the Keswick and Wastwater mountains, and as he passed from crag to crag or "hunted the waterfalls," he jotted down in pencil the minutest features of the scene. Often, too, he noted the effects of mist and sunshine on the hills, of cloud and shadow on the Lakes as he sat in the "Organ Room" at Greta Hall. Here is a typical

word-picture of Lake scenery. The date is October 21, 1803 :—

A drizzling rain. Heavy masses of shapeless vapour upon the mountains (Oh, the perpetual forms of Borrowdale!) yet it is no unbroken tale of dull sadness. Slanting pillars travel across the lake at long intervals, the vaporous mass whitens in large stains of light—on the lakeward ridge of that huge arm-chair of Lodore fell a gleam of softest light, that brought out the rich hues of the late autumn. . . . Little woolpacks of white bright vapour rest on different summits and declivities. The vale is narrowed by the mist and cloud, yet through the wall of mist you can see into a bower of sunny light, in Borrowdale; the birds are singing in the tender rain, as if it were the rain of April, and the decaying foliage were flowers and blossoms (*Anima Poetæ*, 1895, p. 34).

The greater part of these topographical notes were, no doubt, originally composed with a view to writing a Guide-book to the Lake district, but long after that visionary scheme had been abandoned the habit remained of confiding his impressions to his note-books, "the confidants who have *not* betrayed me, the friends whose silence is not detraction, and the inmates before whom I was not ashamed to complain, to yearn, to weep, and even to pray." In April 1804 Coleridge left England for a two years' sojourn on the Continent. Thenceforth, until his death in 1834, he wrote but little verse, and on the rare occasions when the "genial ray" returned, the inspiration was from within, and of place, circumstance, or of communion with Nature there is only an occasional intimation. But neither "abstruse research," nor sickness, nor sorrow, nor "the poisons of



self-harm " could make him a stranger or an alien in the courts of Nature. He gives proof of this in some stanzas entitled *Recollections of Love*, which were written on revisiting Nether Stowey in the summer of 1807 :—

Eight springs have flown since last I lay
On seaward Quantock's heathy hills,
Where quiet sounds from hidden rills
Float here and there, like things astray,
And high o'er head the sky-lark shrills.

Or take this glimpse of early morning on a hillside, from *Alice du Clos*, a later poem of uncertain date :—

There stands the flow'ring may-thorn tree !
From thro' the veiling mist you see
The black and shadowy stem ;—
Smit by the sun the mist in glee
Dissolves to lightsome jewelry—
Each blossom hath its gem !

Or this momentary response to the sweet influences of a sunny day in February 1827 :—

All Nature seems at work. Slugs leave their lair—
The bees are stirring—birds are on the wing—
And Winter, slumbering in the open air,
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring !
And I the while, the sole unbusy thing,
Nor honey make, nor pair, nor build, nor sing.

Work without Hope, from which these lines are taken, and the exquisite *Garden of Boccaccio* (sole poetic testimony of a visit to Italy) were written in Coleridge's later days when "he sat on the brow of Highgate Hill," when Nature in her homelier or in her

wilder aspects was but a memory of the past, when it sufficed him to pace slowly along Lovers' Lane, or among the trees in front of "The Grove," or to look from his attic window across Lord Mansfield's woods to the country beyond. But the day had been when Philosophy had borne "no other name but Poesie," and to the last he kenned "the banks where amaranths blow." Though he had deserted Nature, Nature ne'er deserted him. Let him speak for himself:—

The love of Nature is ever returned double to us, not only the delighter in our delight, but by linking our sweetest, but, of themselves, perishable feelings to distinct and vivid images. . . . She is the preserver, the treasurer of our joys. . . . And even when all men have seemed to desert us and the friend of our heart has passed on, with one glance from his "cold disliking eye"—yet, even then, the blue heaven spreads it out and bends over us, and the little tree still shelters us under its plumage as a second cope, a domestic firmament, and the low creeping gale will sigh in the heath-plant, and soothe us by sound of sympathy till the lulled grief lose itself in fixed gaze on the purple heath-blossom, till the present beauty becomes a vision of memory (*Anima Poetae*, p. 246).

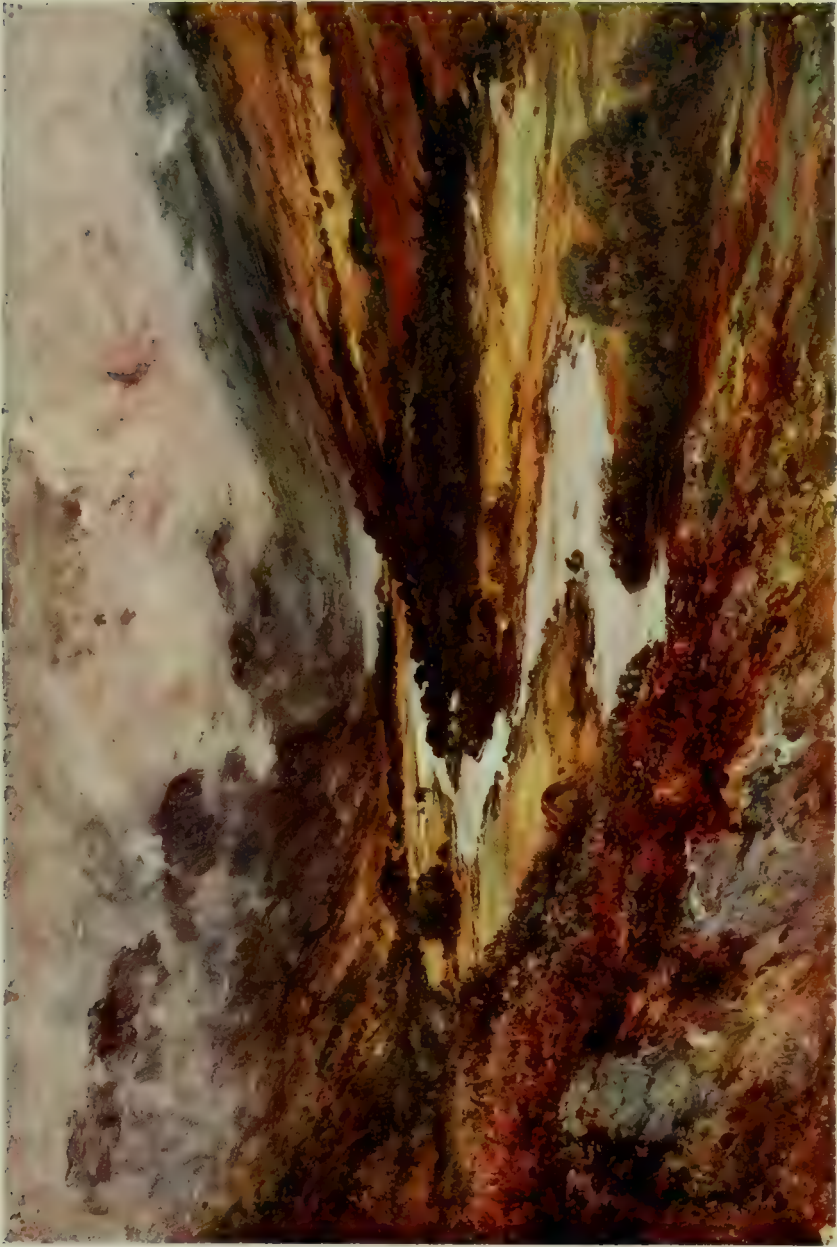
SCOTT

Not less than Wordsworth's the Muse of Scott is the child and lover of Nature, and "Nature mourns her worshipper," where "the sound of all others most delicious to his ear, the gentle ripple of Tweed over its pebbles," murmurs by Sir Walter's tomb at Dryburgh. Scott has remarked in *Rob Roy* on 'the personal feeling of affection, and almost of reverence, which his countrymen entertain for the rivers of their native land, like the Greeks, and a legend tells of a lady who loved Tweed as dearly as Tyro, in Homer, loved Enipeus, "far the fairest of all streams that wander through the world." Though born in Edinburgh, Scott was a son of the Tweed; from Tweed-side, and from the tributaries of the Tweed, Ettrick, Yarrow, and Teviot, came the forefathers who bequeathed to him his spirit and his memories of the past. His "fancy's wakening hour," he says, was passed, indeed,

and where no broad river swept along,
 scarce a puny streamlet's speed
 Claimed homage from the shepherd's reed.

But Smailholme Tower and Sandyknowe farm, where his fancy awoke, were, at least, in Tweeddale, and the vigorous lame child could soon visit the Border waters on his pony. He fell in love with the pastoral streams, as every Borderer does; he knew them in every aspect, whether flowing clear in summer from pool to pool, or rushing "great and muckle o' spate," foaming red from brim to brim; or full and dark, of the colour that the salmon-fisher loves. It was his joy to ride the most dangerous fords, and to light the black woods at night with the flame of the salmon-leisterer, no less than to fish the summer clearness with the fly, or to dream beneath a tree above the flowing water. To him, his bare grey hills were more charming than even the raven-haunted precipices and black, enchanted lochs of Skye; and *ces bosses verdâtres*, as Prosper Mérimée described the hills of Tweedside, were to him enchanted land. Born in a city which has at least the most beautiful of all situations, if it lacks the colour of Athens, Sir Walter was also born in an old house, "at the head of the College Wynd," whence nothing more beautiful than squalid streets was to be seen. But the house stood on the site of a mystery and a tragedy, the Kirk o' Field, where Darnley was murdered.

As if by a combination of early influences, memory of the storied past was, from childhood, blended in Scott's fancy with love of Nature. For him, river and burn, loch and hill were not in themselves enough: he must know what befell the ancient dwellers in these



places—know their fortunes, their joys and sorrows, and their dreams; know the fairies and ghosts that had haunted them of old. He saw Nature in a kind of mirage of the past, and every landscape was haunted, for him, by Border riders and Celtic warriors, by maids glad or despairing, by foredoomed kings and unhappy queens of the Stuart line. The Dowie Dens of Yarrow are exquisitely fair, whether the term be applied to the deep, dark pools by Harehead, or to the green holms where stands the stone inscribed in barbaric Latin. It is not the beauty alone of the river, and its pastoral melancholy, that inspire Scott, but recollections of “Willie drowned in Yarrow,” and of lovers slain in desperate duel beside the water. The most bare and unlovely of Fifeshire moors captivated him, because here he remembered the pursuit and slaughter of Archbishop Sharp by a crew of godly ruffians who deemed themselves inspired.

His first memories were of Smailholme, the tall, dark, narrow peel-tower standing black against the sky-line on its naked cliff, above its rushy tarn. There

was poetic impulse given
By the green hill and clear blue heaven. . . .

It was a barren scene and wild,
Where naked cliffs were rudely piled;
But ever and anon between
Lay velvet tufts of loveliest green;
And well the lonely infant knew
Recesses where the wallflower grew,
And honeysuckle loved to crawl
Up the low crag and ruin'd wall.

The child is taken by what lies at its feet, what its hands can touch, before it has learned to look abroad over the vast level land, the fighting ground of Scots and English. But, almost at once, the child is taught to look "all down Teviotdale,"

When some strange tale bewitched my mind,
Old forayers, who, with headlong force,
Down from that strength had spurred their horse.

From "that strength"

The Baron of Smaylho'me rose with day,
He spurr'd his courser on
Without stop or stay down the rocky way
That leads to Brotherston.

Many of Scott's landscapes are seen from horseback, during "grand gallops on the hills," "when I was thinking of *Marmion*." This poet did not sit under a suburban tree at Hampstead, listening to and out-singing the nightingale, like Keats: he composed in the saddle, and his verse went to

The cavalry canter of Bonny Dundee.

You hear the jingle of the reins, and the clash of sword on stirrup, and with twilight comes the Court of the Fairy Queen, riding to meet Thomas of Ercildoune "beneath the Eildon Tree."

Even at three or four years of age the Border poet mingled Nature with visions out of the lost years:—

Methought that still, with tramp and clang,
The gateway's broken arches rang;

Methought grim features, seam'd with scars,
 Glared through the window's rusty bars,
 And ever, by the winter hearth,
 Old tales I heard of woe or mirth,
 Of lovers' slights, of ladies' charms,
 Of witches' spells, of warriors' arms;
 Of patriot battles, won of old
 By Wallace wight and Bruce the bold;
 Of later fields of feud and fight,
 When, pouring from their Highland height,
 The Scottish clans, in headlong sway,
 Had swept the scarlet ranks away.

The child, gazing

where the triple pride
 Of Eildon overlooks Strathclyde,

hears the tramp and sees the fires of the Roman
 legionaries who held their station below the hill. He
 believes that in a cavern of the rock slumbers Thomas
 the Rhymer, among a company of sleeping men-at-
 arms, who shall rise and ride at Scotland's need. He
 knows the fairy dell, later his own, where True Thomas
 met his unearthly paramour, and whence he wandered
 with her across red-running streams,

For a' the bluid that's shed on earth
 Flows in the stream of this countrie.

He knows how

Ancram Moor
 Ran red with English blood;
 Where the Douglas true, and the bold Buccleuch
 'Gainst keen Lord Evers stood.

He has seen the stone called "Turn Again," where the

Scotts, in their flight, turned against the Kers, in the last great clan battle, when

Gallant Cessford's heart-blood dear
Reek'd on dark Elliot's Border spear.

Already the child has heard of Prince Charles, his victories and his defeat, and resents the bloody assize of Carlisle. He peoples the landscape with "Wat of Harden, Wight Willie of Aikwood, Jamie Telfer of the Fair Dodhead," and other heroes; "not forgetting" the celebrated Deil of Littledean, "who married his great-grand-aunt." Who can revive "the stories, grave and gay, comic and warlike," of the Deil of Littledean? *Caret vate sacro*. Ballads enough the child already knew, and thus he was cradled in romance, after a fashion unexampled in the history of modern poets,—in the history of any poets,—since Homer learned the legends of every river and hill and town of heroic Greece.

Always the first scenery in Sir Walter's mind is that of the Border. He knew scenes much more beautiful: the landscapes of the West Highland coast, and of the islands, the mountains so rich, soft, and various in colour, so distinguished in outline, with the swift tides flowing and receding, like great translucent rivers, far into the recesses of the hills. He knew these things of beauty, but only as a visitor, they were not places in his own country; his life had not been passed among them, they made no part of his earliest memories.



Much as he knew of Highland tradition, he had not the language of the people who preserve it ; in fact, the far more beautiful mountains of Moydart and Morvern were not so haunted, for him, as his own green or heather-clad, round-shouldered knowes. These undulations and protuberances of the soil—commonly as destitute of outline as the Countess disdainfully referred to by Mr. Mantalini—Sir Walter was pleased to call “mountains.” His partiality for them was as tender, as pardonable, and as excessive as the partiality of a mother for her plain children. The alien who visits the Border with Scott’s poetry in his mind is, I must admit, apt to be disappointed. Scott, in his mind, “has a vision of his own,” like the lover’s vision of his lady. The rest of mankind did not see the Cid as Chimène saw him, or Chimène as the Cid saw her ; and in the same way Scott’s love of his own country idealised her honest, sonsy features, and made his sherifffdom “an unsubstantial fairy place.” In his Epistle to the Rev. John Marriott, M.A. (*Marmion*, Introduction to Canto II.), Sir Walter thus describes the loch of St. Mary’s, at the head of Yarrow :—

Oft in my mind such thoughts awake,
By lone Saint Mary’s silent lake ;
Thou know’st it well,—nor fen, nor sedge,
Pollute the pure lake’s crystal edge ;
Abrupt and sheer, the mountains sink
At once upon the level brink ;
And just a trace of silver sand
Marks where the water meets the land.

Far in the mirror, bright and blue,
 Each hill's huge outline you may view;
 Shaggy with heath, but lonely bare,
 Nor tree, nor bush, nor brake, is there,
 Save where, of land, yon slender line
 Bears thwart the lake the scatter'd pine,
 Yet even this nakedness has power,
 And aids the feeling of the hour:
 Nor thicket, dell, nor copse you spy,
 Where living thing conceal'd might lie;
 Nor point, retiring, hides a dell,
 Where swain, or woodman lone, might dwell;
 There's nothing left to fancy's guess,
 You see that all is loneliness:
 And silence aids—though the steep hills
 Send to the lake a thousand rills;
 In summer-tide, so soft they weep,
 The sound but lulls the ear asleep;
 Your horse's hoof-tread sounds too rude,
 So stilly is the solitude.

If "thou knowest it well" could be said with truth to Mr. Marriott, he must have smiled when he read this landscape in rhyme.

Moi aussi, I know "lone St. Mary's silent lake" very well, and am much attached to it, when it *is* lonely, and not sonorous with the whoops of excursionists playing at kiss-in-the-ring. But the pure lake is not "crystal," the water is of the wonted mossy brown. It is by a wonderful stretch of loving memory that Scott ventures to say:—

Abrupt and sheer, the mountains sink
 At once upon the level brink.

There are no mountains, nothing is "abrupt," nothing

is "sheer"; green, grassy slopes descend placidly to the loch on one side, the other side is a plain, to which hills fall easily. It is quite true that there are no trees, except where the "slender line" of land parts St. Mary's from the Loch of the Lowes. There is even no "trace of silver sand," there is merely the white margin of dry stones, ordinary stones, whatever their formation may be. As to "a thousand rills," unless you call Meggat water a "rill" (it is a sizable burn), I do not think there is a rill about the place.

Pardon me, St. Mary of the Lowes, and Spirit of Sir Walter! but affection designed the picture, which is destitute of topographical accuracy. The poet, in short, is in love with the haunted loneliness where stands "Dryhope's ruined tower," and he "thinks on Yarrow's faded flower," his ancestress, and on "the Wizard Priest" buried in the chapel that his clan destroyed, because they could not find there a gentleman whose throat they were anxious to cut.

They burn'd the chapel for very rage,
And cursed Lord Cranstoun's Goblin Page—

a circumstance charming to Scott, as the Cranstouns were his intimate friends.

He goes on to write of dark Loch Skene as if it were no less wild and romantic than Loch Coruisk, whereas it is a black, desolate, windy tarn enough, with a scathed kind of look, while its waters do escape down a perpendicular steep into a respectable cascade. The

peculiarity of this lochan of the heights is the sudden onfall of dense white fogs, into which to walk is more than a man's life is worth. Loch Skene, I confess, is an uncanny place, and thereby Hob Dob and Davie Din met and overcame the Accuser of the Brethren; but Loch Skene is not so grandiose as Sir Walter painted it. Many years ago a lady made these comments to the late Lord Napier, whose dwelling was in upper Ettrick. "The hills," she said, "are like a series of green dish-covers." His Lordship was devoted to "his ain countrie," but he answered, with a twinkle of the eye, that "all his life he had been trying not to think so."

"Thus plainly speaketh Montaigne concerning cats," says Izaak Walton, who clearly looked on cats in a proper spirit of reverence. Following the candid example of Montaigne, I have ventured to speak plainly about the Border hills, which disappoint a stranger as they disappointed Washington Irving. But there are Border hills and Border hills. No one should be disappointed who approaches them, as Scott did for several of his happiest years, from Ashestiel, his home on the upper Tweed. Here the river no longer flows through mere green uplands, but is beset by steep, wooded banks, the knees of the heather-clad hills which divide Tweed from Ettrick and Yarrow. Though not high, they are beautiful in colour, and the Weirclaw and Ettrickpen have charm of outline. They are not visible from Abbotsford, but from



Cauldshields Loch, a tarn lying high on the Abbotsford estate. Behind Ashestiel, up the Peel burn, it is an easy walk or ride to summits which look down on the vale of Yarrow, and on Minchmuir, across which Montrose rode in the flight from the fatal field of Philiphaugh. While Tweed from Peebles to the lovely site of Yair is always variously beautiful, it attains its highest charm below Abbotsford, from Melrose, so nobly sung of in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, through Gladswood, Makerstoun, and Mer-toun. William of Deloraine's ride, in the *Lay*, combines pictures of all the landscapes from Branxholme in upper Teviotdale, to Ail and Tweed, ending with the lines on fair Melrose, too familiar for quotation, while the Introductory Epistle to the First Canto of *Marmion* describes the little old house of Ashestiel as it is when

November's sky is chill and drear,
November's leaf is red and sear.

Every one has regretted that Scott, when obliged to leave Ashestiel, fixed his home on "a bare haugh and a bank" at Abbotsford. Here he was in the centre of his own country, but the site and the views from the site are not beautiful. The artist has chosen to illustrate Melrose Abbey and the Tweed at Ashestiel for his Border sketches. For the Highland landscapes he has selected the Pass and the Falls of Leny, the gates of Scott's other enchanted land, the Highlands, within cry of Benledi and Benvoirlich. He had a drop

of Campbell blood, through a grandmother, though he was not especially partial to the great anti-Jacobite clan in his writings. His heart, at least, was with the clans that fought for Charlie—Stewarts, Macdonalds, Macleans, and the disinherited tribe of Macgregors. Yet, so evenly was Sir Walter's heart balanced by his head, that, had he lived in 1745, he might have mounted the Black Cockade and served King George, not King James, as one of the rather inglorious Edinburgh Volunteers. However that may have been, from infancy, like most children, he favoured the Rightful Cause, and in the Macgregors and Macdonalds recognised men who, up to his grandfather's time, lived much like his own Border ancestors.

The Highlands, though he knew them less well, were nearest to the Border in his sympathies. He was not more than fifteen when, as a lawyer's clerk, and on a very unsympathetic errand, he first rode through the passes from Perth, among the glens whither he later conducted Waverley and Montrose. The Pass of Leny is described in the opening of *The Legend of Montrose*; above this beautiful gateway of the hills the great Marquis meets the no less immortal Dugald Dalgetty, though how Dalgetty, coming from the Continent, found himself there is an unsolved mystery. His first view of Perth, at the age of fifteen, Scott describes in the Introduction to *The Fair Maid of Perth*: "I recollect pulling up the reins without meaning to do so, and gazing on the scene before me

as if I had been afraid it would shift, like those in a theatre, before I could distinctly observe its different parts, or convince myself that what I saw was real. Since that hour the recollection of that inimitable landscape has possessed the strongest influence over my mind, and retained its place as a memorable thing, while much that was influential on my fortunes has fled from my recollection."

What could be more "influential on his own fortunes" than the scenes that were to make him celebrated because he celebrated them? The aspect of Glencoe, beheld on a day of storm, remained equally memorable to Dickens, but for the Massacre and the legends of Glencoe Dickens appears not to have cared. Scott, on the other hand, felt near Perth that he was standing where Agricola may have stood, comparing in his mind the Tay with his native Tiber, the Inch of Perth with the Campus Martius. In the town at his feet Scott remembered that James I. was cruelly murdered; that here Knox had witnessed the destruction of palace and monasteries, that hither James VI. had ridden from Falkland to that ill dinner whereafter the Ruthvens, his hosts, were slain in their own halls. Here Queen Mary, fresh from France, was insulted in the Protestant pageants, and received the gift of a diamond cross from some loyal hand; here James VIII. loitered hopeless, in 1715-1716; here Prince Charles rested in the first hopes of the march to Prestonpans; and far beyond lay the hills of

romance. The place was as rich in many memories as in beauty.

For an intimate knowledge of scenes more remote and romance less distant Scott presently became indebted to Stewart of Invernahyle, who had been out in 1715 and 1745, and had fought a sword-and-target duel with Rob Roy. He penetrated into the green hills of Appin, then still held by the Stewarts—a land rich in traditions of war and of fairies, and in the second-sight. Journeying with a military escort for the eviction of Maclaren tenants of Stewart of Appin, he first saw Loch Katrine and the Trossachs, which he brought half the world to see, by the spells of *The Lady of the Lake*.

Boon nature scatter'd, free and wild,
Each plant or flower, the mountain's child.
Here eglantine embalm'd the air,
Hawthorn and hazel mingled there ;
The primrose pale and violet flower,
Found in each cliff a narrow bower ;
Fox-glove and night-shade, side by side,
Emblems of punishment and pride,
Grouped their dark hues with every stain
The weather-beaten crags retain.
With boughs that quaked at every breath,
Grey birch and aspen wept beneath ;
Aloft, the ash and warrior oak
Cast anchor in the rifted rock ;
And, higher yet, the pine-tree hung
His shatter'd trunk, and frequent flung,
Where seem'd the cliffs to meet on high,
His boughs athwart the narrow'd sky.
Highest of all, where white peaks glanced,
Where glist'ning streamers waved and danced,

The wanderer's eye could barely view
 The summer heaven's delicious blue ;
 So wondrous wild, the whole might seem
 The scenery of a fairy dream.

Onward, amid the copse 'gan peep
 A narrow inlet, still and deep,
 Affording scarce such breadth of brim
 As served the wild duck's brood to swim.
 Lost for a space, through thickets veering,
 But broader when again appearing,
 Tall rocks and tufted knolls their face
 Could on the dark-blue mirror trace ;
 And farther as the Hunter stray'd,
 Still broader sweep its channels made.
 The shaggy mounds no longer stood,
 Emerging from entangled wood,
 But, wave-encircled, seem'd to float,
 Like castle girdled with its moat ;
 Yet broader floods extending still
 Divide them from their parent hill,
 Till each, retiring, claims to be
 An islet in an inland sea.

The Highland landscapes, farther north and in the Isles, Scott did not know till he sailed round the coasts, after writing *Waverley*, in 1814. They are reflected in *The Lord of the Isles*—the desolate peaks and the black lochs of Skye, and the ruined castles of the Celtic princes :—

Each on its own dark cape reclined,
 And listening to its own wild wind,

and reminiscent of its own wilder history of cruel clan wars. It is a fact little known, if we may trust to tradition for facts, that, as late as the Restoration,

Lochaber was the scene of slayings more fierce, between men of the same name and kin, than those which used to desolate heathen or half-converted Iceland six centuries earlier. The stories told by "John Sobieski and Charles Edward Stuart" concerning "the Feuds of Keppoch," in their *Lays of the Deer Forest*, merely stagger the Lowland reader. Scott does not dwell on these astonishingly picturesque events in his poetry, but he knew more legends than any other Sassenach, though, unluckily, he never acquired Gaelic. His excursions into that tongue make the learned smile and sigh! None the less, like Yama the discoverer of Death, in the *Rig Veda*, "he opened a path unto many" into the Highlands. He never ceased to love them. In his dying days, in Italy, he beheld Lake Avernus, and astonished an English companion by muttering,

Up the rocky hill-side,
And down the scroggy glen,
We daurna gang a-milking,
For Charlie and his men!

Why he thus spoke, there, I never could guess till I read in Lockhart's MS. Diary that "Lake Avernus is like a third-rate Highland loch."

Has not Sir Walter, appropriately, but careless of prosody, quoted

Moritur et moriens dulces reminiscitur Argos?

On his way to death, in Italy, his heart was in the Highlands. He could not stay in Rome, and leave his



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ashes near the dust of the Royal line. He hurried back to lay himself where, in a love-letter to his bride, long ago, he had expressed his wish to lie at last, in the ruined abbey of Dryburgh, within the sound of the water of the Tweed.

The deep and strong affection of his nature had transfigured each hill and burn, river, loch, and crumbling tower of his own and his father's land, that is now to the world a sacred place. The haunted crests of the cloven hill of Eildon are his monument, as Ida of the many springs is the monument of Homer.

## SHELLEY AND NATURE

THE truth about Shelley's poetical relation to Nature may be attained, with mathematical precision, by reversing everything that has been said in the case of Scott. Sir Walter with half his soul inhabited the past: Shelley hated the past, detested the study of History, and dwelt in his own ideal future. Scott, though intellectually a friend of the principles of the Reformation, displays in his poems and novels a great tenderness for the ancient faith; while Shelley, in a soaring effort, wrote of

Bloody Faith, the foulest spawn of Time.

Scott rejoiced in local traditions, but I cannot remember that Shelley ever alluded to those of his own neighbourhood, for example, to the headless ghost that leaped up behind solitary riders, though he spoke of the monstrous serpent which, "in the time of King James I., was seen to walk upon feet . . . a serpent of countenance very proud." The animal was supposed, by local naturalists, to be on the point of developing wings.



Shelley's natal chamber looked out over "placid Sussex grass-land," a featureless landscape, while "the mountainous outline of Hindhead" (I quote from Professor Dowden) is visible from the garden. The mountainous outline of Hindhead had not the romantic associations of the Wardlaw Hill or of Smailholme Tower; and Shelley, from childhood upwards, constructed his romances with no local reference. In place of reading, when a boy, the Border ballads and Ariosto, he rejoiced, like other boys, in the crude inventions of "sixpenny shockers"; and while, unlike Dickens and Scott, he found Fielding and Smollett "tame," he seems to have rejoiced, like Sir Walter, in the romances of Mrs. Radcliffe. She, who had never been in Italy, may have turned his thoughts, by her description of Italian mountains, in the direction of that land of robbers' castles and of murderous priests. From such books as hers Shelley derived the Italy tenanted by the bold bad hero of his schoolboy romance, *Zastrozzi*. At Eton, Shelley's one battle was so far Homeric in that his prowess resembled that of Paris in his duel with Menelaus. The placid scenery of Eton only once recognisably inspires his Muse, nor does "the mountainous outline" of Shotover appear in his verse. He left the Oxford landscape to Matthew Arnold: the Thames was associated in his mind with tea, rolls, eggs, and radishes. The British landscape before him was transfigured in his dreams, and English Nature became a mere *point de repère*, whence he built up

visions of stupendous beauty ; alps shivered by lightning and thunder ; "airy battlements that surmount the universe." Shelley's soul was always wandering in lands which his feet never trod. He commenced poet with an epic (mainly unpublished) on "The Wandering Jew," the foregoer of such roamers as his hero in *Alastor* and his Prince Athanase. Deserts uninhabited, unsailed seas, mountain gorges of unfathomed depth, and the vast and vaporous fields and lakes of air make up Shelley's favourite landscape. Like Euripides he is "a meteoric poet" ; the Nature which charms him most is elemental : snow and fire and empty illimitable sea, not the quiet fields in which are the homes of Englishmen.

In 1810 *The Wandering Jew* was offered to Ballantyne and Co., "Co." being Mr. Walter Scott. One or other of the Ballantynes (Professor Dowden says that it was John) replied that, as *The Lady of the Lake* had been assailed by the Presbyterian ministers for "atheistical doctrines," it was too dangerous to publish *The Wandering Jew*. That Hebrew can scarcely have been an atheist—at least he must have been a very stiff-necked person if he was—but probably the poem was hardly orthodox.

Shelley has left, by a kind of accident, a description of an Oxford landscape : nothing can be less like the gorgeous panoramas of *Alastor* and *The Revolt of Islam*. "We suddenly turned the corner of a lane, and the view, which its high banks and hedges had con-

cealed, presented itself. The view consisted of a windmill, standing in one among many plashy meadows, enclosed with stone walls; the irregular and broken ground between the wall and the road in which we stood; a long low hill behind the windmill; and a grey covering of uniform cloud spread over the evening sky. It was that season when the last leaf had just fallen from the scant and stunted ash." Here, in few words, is painted a scene that lives before "the inner eye": probably the place is somewhere on the river near Godstow. Shelley goes on: "The effect which it produced on me was not such as could have been expected. I suddenly remembered to have seen that exact scene in some dream of long . . ." A blank follows, and then the note, "Here I was obliged to leave off, overcome by thrilling horror."

Writing five years after the event—which, to the ordinary mind seems merely rather curious—Shelley was unable to complete the record, so extraordinary was the impression made on his imagination by the sense

"I have been here before,  
But how or when I cannot tell."

More than other poets, at least in his early years, Shelley moved "in worlds not realised," worlds of dream and vision. The scenery of *Queen Mab* is not earthly but cosmic.

The chariot's way  
Lay through the midst of an immense concave,

Radiant with million constellations, tinged  
 With shades of infinite colour,  
 And semicircled with a belt  
 Flashing incessant meteors.

We are far enough away here from the scenes that Shelley knew ; " the meadows and the quiet trees " ; the windmill, the low hill, the plashy fields, the stunted leafless ash, and the uniform vault of grey. Shelley prefers to inhabit

Those far clouds of feathery gold  
 Shaded with deepest purple, gleam  
 Like islands on a dark blue sea,

and to gaze down from " the overhanging battlement " of the fairy's cloud palace on " Palmyra's ruined palaces," and the Pyramids by old Nile, while Queen Mab (never was fairy so didactic!) discourses on the mutability of human existence. Meanwhile, listening to Mab,

The Spirit,  
 In ecstasy of admiration, felt  
 All knowledge of the past revived,

including some hints on the civilisation of prehistoric Greenland.

We are not sorry when the sermon of the advanced fairy is over, and

Speechless with bliss the Spirit mounts the car,

and drives home to Ianthe. As Mrs. Shelley says, in *Queen Mab* Shelley " made the whole universe the object and subject of his song." On the other hand, the eastern hemisphere sufficed as the subject of









*Alastor*. Shelley had now tasted the joys of a wandering existence, travelling with a donkey, like Mr. Stevenson, through France to Switzerland, visiting the source of the Thames, and making a voyage in a wherry from Windsor to Cricklade. "*Alastor* was composed on his return." Another poet might now have been inspired to treat Nature in the spirit of *The Scholar Gipsy*. Not so Shelley. He makes his poet "seek strange truths in undiscovered lands," and

His wandering step  
Obedient to high thoughts, has visited  
The awful ruins of the days of old :  
Athens, and Tyre, and Balbec, and the waste  
Where stood Jerusalem, the fallen towers  
Of Babylon, the eternal pyramids,  
Memphis and Thebes, and whatsoe'er of strange  
Sculptured on alabaster obelisk,  
Of jasper tomb, or mutilated sphinx,  
Dark Ethiopia in her desert hills  
Conceals. Among the ruined temples there,  
Stupendous columns, and wild images  
Of more than man, where marble dæmons watch  
The Zodiac's brazen mystery, and dead men  
Hang their mute thoughts on the mute walls around,  
He lingered, poring on memorials  
Of the world's youth, through the long burning day  
Gazed on those speechless shapes, nor, when the moon  
Filled the mysterious halls with floating shades  
Suspended he that task, but ever gazed  
And gazed, till meaning on his vacant mind  
Flashed like strong inspiration, and he saw  
The thrilling secrets of the birth of time.

Starting from Athens, the pilgrim of the poem begins a pedestrian tour to Balbec, Babylon, Memphis,

the Soudan, Arabia, Persia, and so through Central Asia and the Oxus to Cachmire, returning by way of Aornos and Balk to "the lone Chorasmian shore," where he is fortunate enough to find a casual boat in

a wide and melancholy waste  
Of putrid marshes.

The boat not being padlocked, he goes on board, and pushes off.

At midnight  
The moon arose: and lo! the ethereal cliffs  
Of Caucasus, whose icy summits shone  
Among the stars like sunlight, and around  
Whose caverned base the whirlpools and the waves  
Bursting and eddying irresistibly  
Rage and resound for ever.—Who shall save?—  
The boat fled on,—the boiling torrent drove,—  
The crags closed round with black and jagged arms,  
The shattered mountain overhung the sea,  
And faster still, beyond all human speed,  
Suspended on the sweep of the smooth wave,  
The little boat was driven. A cavern there  
Yawned, and amid its slant and winding depths  
Ingulphed the rushing sea. The boat fled on  
With unrelaxing speed.—"Vision and Love!"  
The poet cried aloud, "I have beheld  
The path of thy departure. Sleep and death  
Shall not divide us long."

The poet finally expires, alone, on the brink of a tremendous chasm.

Such were, on Shelley's genius, the singular results of a view of the Alps, and a boating tour on the Thames. He was incapable of following the advice of

Sidney Smith, "Take short views." His powers were still immature; he had not yet "found himself," but he already was and he remained a cosmic, not an earthly poet. In the *Revolt of Islam* he sees the world and life in the light of

A wandering Meteor by some wild wind sent,  
Hung high in the green dome, to which it lent  
A faint and pallid lustre.

It seemed as if Shelley could not come down to earth, except to brand priests and kings with his wrath, to describe the hecatombs of their victims, and to watch

the sad pageant of man's miseries.

His pleasure is taken in enchanted boats, floating through the ocean of air! At Oxford, however, he was not a boating man

My soul is an enchanted boat,  
Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float  
Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing;  
And thine doth like an angel sit  
Beside a helm conducting it,  
Whilst all the winds with melody are ringing.  
It seems to float ever, for ever,  
Upon that many-winding river,  
Between mountains, woods, abysses,  
A paradise of wildernesses!  
Till, like one in slumber bound,  
Borne to the ocean, I float down, around,  
Into a sea profound, of ever-spreading sound.

Meanwhile thy spirit lifts its pinions  
 In music's most serene dominions ;  
 Catching the winds that fan that happy heaven.  
 And we sail on, away, afar,  
 Without a course, without a star,  
 But, by the instinct of sweet music driven ;  
 Till through Elysian garden islets,  
 By thee, most beautiful of pilots,  
 Where never mortal pinnace glided,  
 The boat of my desire is guided :  
 Realms where the air we breathe is love,  
 Which in the winds and on the waves doth move,  
 Harmonising this earth with what we feel above.

We have pass'd Age's icy caves,  
 And Manhood's dark and tossing waves,  
 And Youth's smooth ocean, smiling to betray :  
 Beyond the glassy gulphs we flee  
 Of shadow-peopled Infancy,  
 Through Death and Birth, to a diviner day ;  
 A paradise of vaulted bowers,  
 Lit by downward-gazing flowers,  
 And watery paths that wind between  
 Wildernesses calm and green,  
 Peopled by shapes too bright to see,  
 And rest, having beheld ; somewhat like thee ;  
 Which walk upon the sea, and chaunt melodiously !

"Oh that a chariot of cloud were mine" is always  
 his aspiration. His dwelling is in the cave of "The  
 Witch of Atlas," and it is in her boat that he voyages,  
 high above the less remote of the fixed stars.

Where, like a meadow which no scythe has shaven,  
 Which rain could never bend or whirl-blast shake,  
 With the Antarctic constellations paven,  
 Canopus and his crew, lay the Austral lake—

There she would build herself a windless haven  
Out of the clouds whose moving turrets make  
The bastions of the storm, when through the sky  
The spirits of the tempest thundered by.

A haven beneath whose translucent floor  
The tremulous stars sparkled unfathomably,  
And around which the solid vapours hoar,  
Based on the level waters, to the sky  
Lifted their dreadful crags, and like a shore  
Of wintry mountains, inaccessibly  
Hemmed in with rifts and precipices gray,  
And hanging crags, many a cove and bay.

Mrs. Shelley frankly confesses that she wished her lord to "adopt subjects that would more suit the popular taste than a poem conceived in the abstract and dreamy spirit of *The Witch of Atlas*." "His poems ought to be more addressed to the common feelings of men." "But my persuasions were vain, the mind could not be bent from its natural inclination." "As to real flesh and blood," Shelley wrote to Gisborne, "you know that I do not deal in these articles; you might as well go to a gin-shop for a leg of mutton, as expect anything human or earthly from me." Still his loves, in fact, were human enough, though in verse they were sublimated into faint and fragrant essences not of this world. "I think," Shelley says, "one is always in love with something or other; the error—and I confess it is not easy for spirits in flesh and blood to avoid it—consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal." The story of Emilia Viviani is entirely human: hardly human is the invitation, in

*Epipsychidion*, to a Paradise earthly indeed, but not to be found on earth.

Emily,

A ship is floating in the harbour now,  
 A wind is hovering o'er the mountain's brow,  
 There is a path on the sea's azure floor,  
 No keel has ever ploughed that path before ;  
 The halcyons brood around the foamless isles ;  
 The treacherous Ocean has forsworn its wiles ;  
 The merry mariners are bold and free :  
 Say, my heart's sister, wilt thou sail with me ?  
 Our bark is as an albatross whose nest  
 Is a far Eden of the purple East ;  
 And we between her wings will sit, while Night  
 And Day, and Storm, and Calm, pursue their flight,  
 Our ministers, along the boundless Sea,  
 Treading each other's heels, unheededly.  
 It is an isle under Ionian skies,  
 Beautiful as a wreck of Paradise,  
 And, for the harbours are not safe and good,  
 This land would have remained a solitude  
 But for some pastoral people native there,  
 Who from the Elysian, clear, and golden air  
 Draw the last spirit of the age of gold,  
 Simple and spirited ; innocent and bold.  
 The blue Ægean girds this chosen home,  
 With ever-changing sound and light and foam  
 Kissing the sifted sands and caverns hoar ;  
 And all the winds wandering along the shore  
 Undulate with the undulating tide :  
 There are thick woods where sylvan forms abide ;  
 And many a fountain, rivulet, and pond,  
 As clear as elemental diamond,  
 Or serene morning air ; and far beyond,  
 The mossy tracks made by the goats and deer  
 (Which the rough shepherd treads but once a year),  
 Pierce into glades, caverns, and bowers, and halls  
 Built round with ivy, which the waterfalls



Illumining, with sound that never fails  
 Accompany the noonday nightingales ;  
 And all the place is peopled with sweet airs ;  
 The light clear element which the isle wears  
 Is heavy with the scent of lemon-flowers,  
 Which floats like mist laden with unseen showers,  
 And falls upon the eyelids like faint sleep ;  
 And from the moss violets and jonquils peep,  
 And dart their arrowy odour through the brain,  
 Till you might faint with that delicious pain.

Shelley's landscapes are seldom more terrestrial than this enchanted island. Shelley, unlike Wordsworth, scarcely ever writes "with his eye on the object." The *Lines written among the Euganean Hills* are his closest approach to direct study of landscape.

Ay, many flowering islands lie  
 In the waters of wide Agony :  
 To such a one this morn was led,  
 My bark by soft winds piloted :  
 'Mid the mountains Euganean  
 I stood listening to the pæan,  
 With which the legioned rooks did hail  
 The sun's uprise majestic ;  
 Gathering round with wings all hoar,  
 Through the dewy mist they soar  
 Like gray shades, till the eastern heaven  
 Bursts, and then, as clouds of even,  
 Flecked with fire and azure, lie  
 In the unfathomable sky,  
 So their plumes of purple grain,  
 Starred with drops of golden rain,  
 Gleam above the sunlight woods,  
 As in silent multitudes  
 On the morning's fitful gale  
 Thro the broken mist they sail,

And the vapours cloven and gleaming  
 Follow down the dark steep streaming,  
 Till all is bright, and clear, and still,  
 Round the solitary hill.

Beneath is spread like a green sea  
 The waveless plain of Lombardy,  
 Bounded by the vaporous air,  
 Islanded by cities fair ;  
 Underneath day's azure eyes  
 Ocean's nursling, Venice lies,  
 A peopled labyrinth of walls,  
 Amphitrite's destined halls,  
 Which her hoary sire now paves  
 With his blue and beaming waves.  
 Lo ! the sun upsprings behind,  
 Broad, red, radiant, half-reclined  
 On the level quivering line  
 Of the waters crystalline ;  
 And before that chasm of light,  
 As within a furnace bright,  
 Column, tower, and dome, and spire,  
 Shine like obelisks of fire,  
 Pointing with inconstant motion  
 From the altar of dark ocean  
 To the sapphire-tinted skies ;  
 As the flames of sacrifice  
 From the marble shrines did rise,  
 As to pierce the dome of gold  
 Where Apollo spoke of old.

Shelley's last home, if this wandering spirit could be said to have a home, was the Villa Magni on the bay of Lerici ; behind lie the Carrara hills. " Went ashore to see some fishermen drag their nets," writes Williams, when he and Shelley visited the place in search of a house. I, too, remember seeing the fishers drag their





nets, and rejoice in the capture of a few small fish, on the shingle under the Villa Magni: in stormy weather the waves break against the terrace of the gaunt, melancholy dwelling. Beside the bay Shelley wrote the lines which follow; they are rather concerned with his own emotions when "she left me" ("she" was perhaps Jane Williams) than with the watery plain under his eyes. But he notes one local detail: like Quintus Smyrnæus, so long ago, he saw the fisher's lamp, luring fish to be speared.

She left me at the silent time  
When the moon had ceased to climb  
The azure path of Heaven's steep,  
And like an albatross asleep,  
Balanced on her wings of light,  
Hovered in the purple night,  
Ere she sought her ocean nest  
In the chambers of the West.  
She left me, and I stayed alone  
Thinking over every tone  
Which, though silent to the ear,  
The enchanted heart could hear,  
Like notes which die when born, but still  
Haunt the echoes of the hill;  
And feeling ever—oh, too much!—  
The soft vibration of her touch,  
As if her gentle hand even now,  
Lightly trembled on my brow;  
And thus, although she absent were,  
Memory gave me all of her  
That even Fancy dares to claim:—  
Her presence had made weak and tame  
All passions, and I lived alone  
In the time which is our own;  
The past and future were forgot,  
As they had been, and would be, not.

But soon, the guardian angel gone,  
 The dæmon reassumed his throne  
 In my faint heart. I dare not speak  
 My thoughts, but thus disturbed and weak  
 I sat and saw the vessels glide  
 Over the ocean bright and wide,  
 Like spirit-wingèd chariots sent  
 O'er some serenest element  
 For ministrations strange and far;  
 As if to some Elysian star  
 Sailed for drink to medicine  
 Such sweet and bitter pain as mine.  
 And the wind that winged their flight  
 From the land came fresh and light,  
 And the scent of wingèd flowers,  
 And the coolness of the hours  
 Of dew, and sweet warmth left by day,  
 Were scattered o'er the twinkling bay.  
 And the fisher with his lamp  
 And spear, about the low rocks damp  
 Crept, and struck the fish which came  
 To worship the delusive flame.  
 Too happy they, whose pleasure sought  
 Extinguishes all senses and thought  
 Of the regret that pleasure leaves,  
 Destroying life alone, not peace!

Shelley's genius was ever seeking to lose itself in the  
 cosmos, as the Neo-Platonists strove to lose themselves  
 in God. Almost his last lines appear to prophesy his own  
 fate :

The breath whose might I have invoked in song  
 Descends on me ; my spirit's bark is driven  
 Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng  
 Whose sails were never to the tempest given ;  
 The massy earth and spherèd skies are riven !  
 I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar !



Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of heaven,  
 The soul of Adonais, like a star,  
 Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

He was "lost in the light and the night of the sea."

Visiting Villa Magna, long ago, I went into the dark wood on the cliff to the left hand of the house. The day was still and grey; there came a rustling in the tree-tops, and a great sea-bird flew forth, like the spirit of Shelley, to the sea. Not in houses built by man, not among "the labours of men and oxen," not in any human affection, not in any system of faith or of denial, could the homeless heart of Shelley find repose. *His* "dwelling is the light of setting suns,"—it is of himself that he seems to speak in his lament for Keats.

He is made one with Nature: there is heard  
 His voice in all her music, from the moan  
 Of thunder to the song of night's sweet bird;  
 He is a presence to be felt and known  
 In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,  
 Spreading itself where'er that Power may move  
 Which has withdrawn his being to its own;  
 Which wields the world with never-weary love,  
 Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.

He is a portion of the loveliness  
 Which once he made more lovely: he doth bear  
 His part, while the One Spirit's plastic stress  
 Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there  
 All new successions to the forms they wear;  
 Torturing the unwilling dross that checks its flight  
 To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;  
 And bursting in its beauty and its might  
 From trees and beasts and men into the heaven's light.

## MILTON

WHAT blindness must have meant to Milton can only be fully understood by those who have followed closely the Nature-pictures painted by him before he lost his sight and compared them with their originals. We have only to go to the scenes represented by them, and which suggested and inspired them, to see that at one time at least Nature must have been to him what it was to Dante and Tennyson, that "felt in the heart and felt along the blood," he studied it with minute and loving accuracy. To him, as to the Ancients and to Shakespeare, its phenomena were always, no doubt, of subordinate interest and importance to man and human life, and from the very first the world of books was with him as near and intimate as the world of Nature. As life advanced, the more potent influences gradually intensifying seem so much to have prevailed that the natural images impressed on his mind as he wandered among the scenes of his youth appear to have become almost obliterated. No one can read *Paradise Lost* without being struck by the clairvoyant





power with which his memory recalls—and recalls with the minutest particularity—all that the vast range of his early reading had imprinted on it. Out of every nook and corner of ancient and modern literature the veriest trifles spring to its summons. In antiquities and topography not a detail, however recondite or minute, seems to escape it. We have only to turn to the description of the heathen deities and their habitats in the First Book of *Paradise Lost*, to the map of the world in the Eleventh Book, to the pictures of the Eastern world, of ancient Rome and of the Roman dominions, and of ancient Athens, in the Third and Fourth Books of *Paradise Regained* for illustrations. But in his descriptions of Nature all this particularity disappears. Most of the Eden scenes are rather compiled reminiscences of the Greek, Roman, and Italian poets than pictures recalled from what he had seen. All that seems to have remained to him of early experiences is the general impression made by them: in no touch is there any indication that the eye of memory, so to speak, was on the object recalled. Take the following:—

Now came still Evening on, and Twilight gray  
Had in her sober livery all things clad:  
Silence accompanied; for beast and bird,  
They to their grassy couch, these to their nests  
Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale,  
She all night long her amorous descant sung:  
Silence was pleased: now glowed the firmament  
With living sapphires: Hesperus, that led  
The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon

Rising in clouded majesty, at length  
 Apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light  
 And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.

*Par. Lost*, Book IV.

—exquisite, and very far indeed from falsetto, but epideictic and informed rather by imagination than by memory. In the following the last touch no doubt recorded what he had both felt and witnessed :—

As, when from mountain-tops the dusky clouds  
 Ascending, while the North-wind sleeps, o'erspread  
 Heaven's cheerful face, the louring element  
 Scowls o'er the darkened landskip snow or shower,  
 If chance the radiant sun, with farewell sweet,  
 Extend his evening beam, the fields revive,  
 The birds their notes renew, and bleating herds  
 Attest their joy, that hill and valley rings.

*Idem*, Book II.

One passage there is in *Paradise Lost* in which he did no doubt draw directly from early associations and from what they recalled, and in which his love for the country scenes familiar to him in his youth finds enthusiastic expression :—

As one who, long in populous city pent,  
 Where houses thick and sewers annoy the air,  
 Forth issuing on a summer's morn, to breathe  
 Among the pleasant villages and farms  
 Adjoined, from each thing met conceives delight—  
 The smell of grain or tedded grass, or kine  
 Or dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound.

*Idem*, Book IX.

Perhaps it is not fanciful to suppose that the following passage, which in precision of detail stands



alone in his great Epic, was a reminiscence of what met his view in his wanderings in the neighbourhood of Horton or of Forest Hill; certainly it finds in its chief features its counterpart in Cooper's Hill as it is seen on the Datchet road, or at Forest Hill, where it looks towards Shotover :—

A rural mound, the champaign head  
Of a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides  
With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild,  
Access denied : and overhead upgrew  
Insuperable height of loftiest shade,  
Cedar, and pine, and fir, and branching palm,  
A sylvan scene, and, as the ranks ascend,  
Shade above shade, a woody theatre  
Of stateliest view.

*Par. Lost, Book IV.*

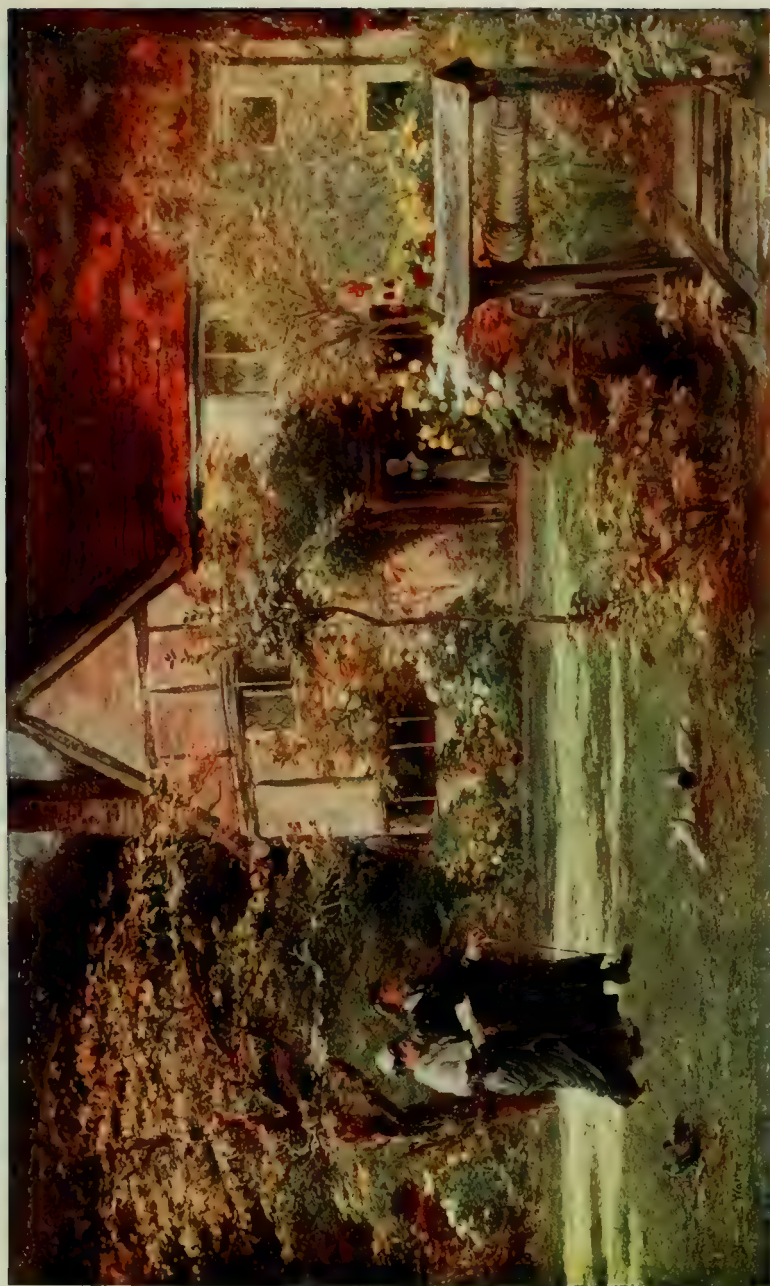
But to come to the scenery which was undoubtedly painted by him in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, in *Comus* and in *Arcades*, and which inspired much of these poems.

In Lord Teignmouth's *Life of Sir William Jones* there is a very interesting letter written by him in September 1769 to Lady Spencer, in which, after quoting a passage from *Il Penseroso* which will be given directly, he tells her how he had identified the description with what he saw at Forest Hill, near Oxford, where it will be remembered Milton's first wife lived, and where he married her.

It was neither the proper season of the year nor the time of day to hear all the rural sounds and see all the objects mentioned, but by a pleasing concurrence of circumstances we were saluted on our approach to the village with the music of the mower and

his scythe: we saw the ploughman intent upon his labour and the milkmaid returning from her cows. As we ascended the hill the variety of beautiful objects, the agreeable stillness, and the natural simplicity of the whole scene gave us the highest pleasure. We at length reached the spot whence Milton undoubtedly took most of his images. It is on the top of the hill from which there is a most extensive prospect on all sides: the distant hills which seem to support the clouds, the villages and turrets, partly shaded with trees of the finest verdure and partly raised above the groves that surround them; the dark plains and meadows of a greyish colour, where the sheep were feeding at large; in short, the view of the stream and rivers convinced us that there was not a single useless or idle word in the above-mentioned description, but that it was a most exact and lively representation of Nature. . . . It must not be omitted that the groves near the village are famous for nightingales. Most of the cottage windows are overgrown with sweet-briars and honeysuckles.

If we suppose, as it generally is supposed, that Milton's intimate acquaintance with Forest Hill did not begin till his visit there in the spring of 1643, when he married Mary Powell, while *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Comus*, and *Arcades* were almost certainly written between 1632 and 1635, when he was at Horton in Buckinghamshire, we must naturally conclude that Sir William Jones was mistaken in identifying the scenery of this place with that described in the poems. And yet he may be right, after all. We know from legal documents that there had been business relations between Milton's father and the Powells as early as 1627, when Milton was in the third year of his residence at Cambridge. It is quite possible that he visited the Powells more than once during the vacations, and that





his marriage with Mary Powell was not a sudden arrangement, but was the result of an attachment formed in her childhood and confirmed by frequent visits to her home. What, therefore, does directly recall Forest Hill and its neighbourhood in these poems may have been, as Sir William Jones conjectured, actually suggested by them. On this point, however, it is impossible to speak with any confidence, for there is little if anything to differentiate the characteristic features of Forest Hill from the characteristic features of Horton except the presence of uplands and hills.

The hamlet at which Milton resided after leaving Cambridge, and where he passed nearly six of the most critical, and certainly the happiest, years of his life, is about four miles from Eton. It lies between Colnbrook on the north, Wraysbury on the south, Middlesex on the east, and that part of Stoke Pogis which looks toward Datchet and Windsor on the west. As you enter the hamlet from the Datchet road, the first object which strikes you is a noble elm, standing solitary on what in Milton's time was the village green, but which is now the centre of a space where three roads meet. On the right, as you proceed up the straggling, thinly-populated village, you pass Horton Cottage, which abuts on the road, and Horton Manor with its well-wooded park standing back some way from the road. A few yards farther on you come to the churchyard, which is surrounded on all sides by stately elm trees picturesquely variegated by pines and other trees,



conspicuous amongst which is a fir tree thickly mantled with ivy. As you enter the churchyard, you see on the left two ancient yew trees long preceding Milton's time, objects on which his eyes must often have rested. A straight path takes you into the church, which has a square tower with walls chequered with flints, and brickwork once picturesquely covered with ivy but now bare and bald. Within the main porch there is a fine old Norman arch, within the church a nave with two aisles and a chancel, between them short circular columns supporting arches. Filling the exact centre of the chancel and directly fronting the Communion Table is a plain, blue, flat stone inscribed with the words :

Here lyeth the Body of Sara  
Milton the wife of John Milton  
who died the 3rd of April 1637.

This marks the resting-place of the poet's mother. Leaving the church and continuing our way through the village, we pass on the left Berkyn Manor, a glaringly modern house standing surrounded by trees and about two hundred yards from the road. On the site now occupied by its vestibule and front portion stood Milton's house, of which not so much as a stone remains. It is in passing over the bridge which spans two branches of the river Coln, about five hundred yards beyond Berkyn Manor, in the view from the garden of the parsonage at the other end of the village, in the view on the road to Colnbrook, and in the general features of the place and its surroundings, particularly



in its wealth of woodland and pasturage and its association with rustic and agricultural pursuits, that we realise how faithfully its features are portrayed by Milton. In one of the *Prousiones Oratoriae*, Academic exercises written by him when at Cambridge, he has recorded his delight in such scenes, the passage unmistakably referring to a summer vacation spent at Horton.

And I myself call to witness the groves and rivers and beloved village elms under which I joyfully remember that during the last past summer I had the utmost delight with the Muses: where methinks among rural scenes and remote glades I could have silently grown up and vegetated.

The scene along the road to Colnbrook, with its flat landscape of pasture and ploughland intersected by runnels of water, and the scene from the parsonage garden with Windsor in the distance, are evidently the inspiration of these lines:—

Sometime walking, not unseen,  
By hedgerow elms, on hillocks green,  
Right against the eastern gate  
Where the great Sun begins his state,  
Rob'd in flames and amber light,  
The clouds in thousand liveries dight;  
While the ploughman, near at hand  
Whistles o'er the furrowed land,  
And the milkmaid singeth blythe,  
And the mower whets his scythe,

Straight mine eye hath caught now pleasures,  
While the landscape round it measures:  
Russet lawns and fallows gray,  
Where the nibbling flocks do stray;

Meadows trim, with daisies pied,  
 Shallow brooks and rivers wide ;  
 Towers and battlements it sees  
 Bosomed high in tufted trees.

While the preceding lines—

Oft listening how the hounds and horn  
 Cheerly rouse the slumbering Morn,  
 From the side of some hoar hill,  
 Through the high wood echoing shrill,

recall a scene with which every one in Horton is familiar even now, when the royal huntsmen in Windsor Park are out. Neither at Horton nor at Forest Hill had he to go far to find

Arched walks of twilight groves  
 And shadows brown, that Sylvan loves,  
 Of pine, or monumental oak,  
 Where the rude axe, with heaved stroke,  
 Was never heard the nymphs to daunt,  
 Or fright them from their hallowed haunt.

At neither place was there, it is true, either

A wide-watered shore  
 Swinging slow with sullen roar ;

or,

Mountains, on whose barren breast  
 The labouring clouds do often rest.

Other familiar features at Horton would be

The folded flocks, penned in their wattled cotes . . .  
 Or whistle from the lodge, or village cock  
 Count the night-watches to his feathery dames ;

There, too, are to-day

The rushy-fringed bank  
 Where grows the willow and the ozier dank ;

The valleys low, where the mild whispers use  
Of shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks ;

and

The shady roof  
Of branching elm star-proof ;

but above all the nightingale. Horton is one of its favourite haunts, and no doubt the following is, like the exquisite sonnet to the Nightingale, but the record of a frequent experience during his residence there :—

Sweet bird, that shunnest the noise of folly,  
Most musical, most melancholy !  
Thee, chantress, oft, the woods among,  
I woo, to hear thy even-song ;  
And, missing thee, I walk unseen  
On the dry, smooth-shaven green,  
To behold the wandering Moon,  
Riding near her highest noon,  
Like one that had been led astray  
Through the heaven's wide pathless way,  
And oft, as if her head she bowed,  
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.

The scene of this was, in all probability, Horton Park, just as that of the Sonnet was, we cannot but feel certain, his father's garden. From the windows of that house almost certainly festooned with

The sweet-briar and the vine,  
Or the twisted eglantine,

he could

Hear the lark begin his flight,  
And, singing, startle the dull night,  
From his watch-tower in the skies,  
Till the dappled dawn doth rise ;

while a few paces off

The cock, with lively din,  
Scatters the rear of darkness thin;  
And to the stack, on the barn door,  
Stoutly struts his dame before.

Nor, later in the day, would he have far to go for the original of—

Hard by, a cottage chimney smokes,  
From betwixt two aged oaks,  
Where Corydon and Thyrsis, met,  
Are at their savoury dinner set  
Of herbs, and other country messes,  
Which the neat-handed Phyllis dresses;  
And then in haste her bower she leaves,  
With Thestylis to bind the sheaves;  
Or, if the earlier season lead,  
To the tanned haycock in the mead.

Certainly if not at Horton, at Forest Hill he might often have seen the original of—

Sometimes, with secure delight,  
The upland hamlets will invite,  
When the merry bells ring round,  
And the jocund rebecks sound  
To many a youth and many a maid  
Dancing in the checkered shade.

No better commentary indeed on *L'Allegro* and on *Il Penseroso* could possibly be found than would be afforded by a ramble about Horton and Forest Hill, for the scenery most characteristic of both places, with touches, no doubt, of other rural haunts beloved in early days by the young Milton, simply penetrates these poems.







## SIR JOHN DENHAM & "COOPER'S HILL"

SOME two years before Milton gave *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Lycidas*, *Arcades*, and *Comus* to the world, appeared a poem the merits of which were extraordinarily overrated by the poets and critics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but which is certainly of some historical importance. We smile now at Pope's "Majestic Denham"; at such a eulogy as

On Cooper's Hill eternal wreaths shall grow,  
While lasts the mountain or while Thames shall flow;

at such a compliment as is implied in what Sheffield says of a poem, "'Tis not an *Iliad* or a *Cooper's Hill*"; or in what Swift says:

This hill may keep the name of Drapier,  
In spite of envy flourish still,  
And Drapier's vie with Cooper's Hill;

and at Johnson's absurd exaltation of him into "one of the fathers of our poetry." The reason for this estimate of him and for the celebrity of his poem is no doubt correctly explained by Johnson. "He seems to have

been, at least among us, the author of a species of composition that may be denominated *local poetry*, of which the fundamental subject is some particular landscape, to be poetically described, with the addition of such embellishments as may be supplied by historical retrospection or incidental meditation." And certainly Denham became the founder of a long dynasty of poets, who with various modifications took his experiment for their pattern—such would be Garth's *Claremont*, Tickell's *Oxford*, and Pope's *Windsor Forest*, in which, as in Denham's case, description is made predominant to the "embellishments" referred to by Johnson. Indeed, Garth's *Claremont*, like Tickell's *Kensington Garden*, is rather an Ovidian phantasy than a descriptive poem. Otway's *Windsor Castle* is little more than a panegyric on Charles II. and James II. In Dyer's *Grongar Hill*, John Scott's *Amwell*, Jago's *Edgehill*, Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head*, Langhorne's *Studley Park*, and Crowe's *Lewesdon Hill*—a poem much admired by Wordsworth—pure description predominates.

Denham's other claims to notice do not concern us, and we must confine ourselves to *Cooper's Hill*. It was published at Oxford on the eve of the great Civil War, in 1643, just after Denham, who was a staunch Royalist, had resigned the governorship of Farnham Castle and had retreated to Oxford.

To understand the poem we should make our way to the exact site, or as near as possible to the exact site, on which Denham must have stood as he contemplated





the scene described by him. This is not difficult. If we pass through the town of Egham and, ascending the hill for a few hundred yards, take the first turning to the right, we make our way to an elevated plateau. Following the right-hand path and descending a green lane, we find ourselves at what is locally known as the "Look-Out" at the back of Kingswood House. Thence we have a glorious view of the whole valley of the Thames, the vast landscape expanding before our eyes, more thickly wooded, probably, than in Denham's time, but otherwise unchanged. Far away to the left a towering sombre mass, bulking out from green foliage, is Windsor Castle; in front the landscape stretches level right away to the horizon—a variegated panorama of scattered clumps of trees, sunlit meadows, and cornfields, with the Thames winding, a silver thread, through the rich tilth and boskage. Below in front of you, stretching along left and right, is Runnymede, and farther to the left Magna Charta Island. Not far from Magna Charta Island, on the Bucks side of the river, are some old and interesting ruins—portions of a wall with windows in it nearly hidden by masses of ivy—all that now remains of Ankerwyke Priory. This was a small nunnery of the order of St. Benedict, dedicated to St. Mary Magdalen and founded about the time of Henry II. by Sir Gilbert de Montfichet and his son Richard. After the dissolution of the Monasteries the house and site of the Priory were, in 1540, granted by Henry

VIII. to Andrew Lord Windsor, and a mansion was built there either by him or by Sir Thomas Smith, to whom the estate came in 1556, after reverting to the Crown. This, in 1805, was demolished, and the present Ankerwyke House was built. Thus one of the features in Denham's landscape disappeared. It may be noticed, in passing, that in the grounds of Ankerwyke is a noble old yew tree, under which—so local tradition goes—Henry VIII. used secretly to meet Anne Boleyn, before he married her.

Denham begins his poem with what he allows to be a flight of fancy, namely, the view of London and of St. Paul's, which, if discernible, could only be discernible in the way he describes :—

Through untrac'd ways and airy paths I fly,  
 More boundless in my fancy than my eye—  
 My eye which, swift as thought, contracts the space  
 That lies between, and first salutes the place  
 Crown'd with that sacred pile, so vast, so high,  
 That, whether 'tis a part of earth or sky,  
 Uncertain seems, and may be thought a proud  
 Aspiring mountain, or descending cloud.

Then, with a compliment to Charles I. and Henrietta Maria, he turns to Windsor :—

Windsor the next (where Mars with Venus dwells,  
 Beauty with strength) above the valley swells  
 Into my eye, and doth itself present  
 With such an easy and unforced ascent,  
 That no stupendous precipice denies  
 Access, no horror turns away our eyes.

He then goes on to deal with the historical associations



of the place, resuming his description with Ankerwyke Priory :—

But my fix'd thoughts my wandering eye betrays,  
Viewing a neighbouring hill, whose top of late  
A chapel crown'd, till in the common fate  
The adjoining abbey fell.

Again he digresses into reflections on the sacrilege involved in the destruction of the religious houses, recovering not ungracefully the thread of description :—

Parting from thence 'twixt anger, shame, and fear,  
These for what's past and this for what's too near,  
My eye, descending from the hill, surveys  
Where Thames among the wanton vallies strays :  
Thames, the most lov'd of all the Ocean's sons  
By his old sire, to his embraces runs ;  
Hasting to pay his tribute to the sea,  
Like mortal life to meet Eternity.

Other reflections on the river follow, and then, inserted in the second edition of the poem, comes the justly famous apostrophe and aspiration :—

O, could I flow like thee, and make thy stream  
My great example, as it is my theme !  
Though deep, yet clear ; though gentle, yet not dull ;  
Strong without rage, without o'erflowing, full.

He then goes on to describe and comment on the curious contrasted features of the scene—the shaggy tree-thronged hill, the calm water flowing at its foot, and Runnymede, and how Nature harmonises all :—

Wisely she knew the harmony of things,  
As well as that of sounds, from discord springs.  
Such was the discord, which did first disperse  
Form, order, beauty through the universe ;

While dryness moisture, coldness heat resists,  
 All that we have, and what we are, subsists ;  
 While the steep, horrid roughness of the wood  
 Strives with the gentle calmness of the flood,  
 Such huge extremes when Nature doth unite,  
 Wonder from thence results, from thence delight.  
 The stream is so transparent, pure, and clear,  
 That had the self-enamoured youth gaz'd here,  
 So fatally deceived he had not been,  
 While he the bottom, not his face had seen.  
 But his proud head the airy mountain hides  
 Among the clouds ; his shoulders and his sides  
 A shady mantle clothes ; his curlèd brows  
 Frown on the gentle stream, which calmly flows,  
 While winds and storms his lofty forehead beat :  
 The common fate of all that's high or great.  
 Low at his feet a spacious plain is plac'd,  
 Between the mountain and the stream embrac'd,  
 Which shade and shelter from the hill derives,  
 While the kind river wealth and beauty gives.

Then follows a very animated description of a stag-hunt at the foot of the hill in Runnymede. The great transaction of which this meadow was the scene is next referred to, and with some reflections very pertinent to the critical time at which the poem was composed, it concludes.

Nothing could illustrate more strikingly the treatment of Nature by the poets of the Critical school, soon to culminate in Dryden and Pope, than this poem with its thin perception of the picturesque, its insensibility to colour and charm, its absence of enthusiasm, its complete subordination of the beauties of Nature to ethical and political reflection.

## WALLER, COWLEY, AND DRYDEN

WE must go forward to Dryden to find a poet so utterly indifferent to Nature and Nature's works as Waller. There is scarcely a natural image, except of the most commonplace character, to be found in his poetry. Though he has twice celebrated Penshurst, he says not a word about its scenery beyond the ridiculous remark that the trees, when Dorothea sits down, crowd bowing in a circle round her. There is a touch of sentiment in his—

Fade, flowers ! fade, Nature will have it so ;  
'Tis but what we must in our autumn do !  
And as your leaves lie quiet on the ground,  
The loss alone by those who lov'd them found ;  
So in the grave shall we as quiet lie.

But this, commonplace as it is, is paraphrased from the French. His only descriptive poem is *St. James's Park*, which, like Ben Jonson's *Penshurst* and Marvell's *Bilborow* and *Appleton House*, Dr. Johnson seems to have forgotten when he attributed to Denham the introduction of the "local poem" into English literature.

The whole poem is as artificial as the scene it describes, and Waller characteristically avoids dwelling on natural objects, what he says about them being practically confined to the

Young trees upon the banks  
Of the new stream appear in even ranks ;

to the fact that it is

With a border of rich fruit-trees crown'd,  
Whose loaded branches hide the lofty mound ;

and to the

Living gallery of aged trees ;  
Bold sons of earth, that thrust their arms so high,  
As if once more they would invade the sky.

Perhaps his instincts as a sportsman led him to the only vivid natural touch in the whole poem, the startled flight of some wild-fowl :—

Overhead a flock of new-sprung fowl  
Hangs in the air, and does the sun control,  
Dark'ning the sky ; they hover o'er, and shroud  
The wanton sailors with a feather'd cloud.

What applies to Waller most certainly does not apply to his younger contemporary. A prominent place among English poets who have felt the power and charm of Nature must certainly be assigned to Cowley. This, indeed, is no more than might be expected from the author of those delightful prose essays on *Solitude*, *Agriculture*, and *The Garden*. In his Elegy on the death of his Cambridge friend, William

Hervey, we have something approaching to the note of Matthew Arnold's *Thyrsis* anticipated by more than two centuries :—

Ye fields of Cambridge, our dear Cambridge, say,  
Have ye not seen us walking every day ?  
Was there a tree about which did not know  
    The love betwixt us two ?  
Henceforth, ye gentle trees, for ever fade,  
    Or your sad branches darker join,  
    And into darksome shades combine,  
Dark as the grave wherein my friend is laid !

No tuneful birds play with their wonted cheer,  
And call the learned youth to hear ;  
No whistling winds through the glad branches fly :  
    But all, with sad solemnity  
    Mute and unmoved be,  
Mute as the grave wherein my friend does lie.

His *Liber Plantarum*, which being in Latin does not concern us, shows with what minute attention he had studied flowers, and how he delighted in the retreats where they were to be found. The greater part of his poetry treats of themes into which natural description could not very well enter, and like all poets whose taste had been formed on the Latin classics, he did not intrude such descriptions. But in the second of his Odes he gives the rein to his enthusiasm :—

Give me a river which doth scorn to show  
    An added beauty ; whose clear brow  
    May be my looking-glass to see  
What my face is, and what my mind should be !

Here waves call waves, and glide along in rank  
And prattle to the smiling bank.

Daisies, the first-born of the teeming spring,  
On each side their embroidery bring ;  
Here lilies wash, and grow more white,  
And daffodils, to see themselves, delight.

Thus I would waste, thus end, my careless days ;  
And robin redbreasts, whom men praise  
For pious birds, should, when I die,  
Make both my monument and elegy.

A staunch Royalist, he knew little rest for many years, having no leisure either for study or poetry. He served his party well, but was poorly rewarded, and, soured and disappointed, buried himself in retirement, first at Barn Elms and then at Chertsey. Here he wrote his essays, and the poems and translations in which his love for Nature and for communion with it is most eloquently displayed. He translated, or, to speak more correctly, paraphrased sympathetically portions of the poems in which Virgil, Horace, and Martial have sung the praises of country life. But nothing he paraphrased exceeds in charm his own expression of what Nature was to him. The garden and grounds of his house, which were on the level of the meadows which lay in the midst of a picturesque, thickly-wooded district, may still be traced, and we may feel pretty sure that it was in this delightful retreat, and with reference to its features, that he wrote :—



Hail, old patrician trees, so great and good !  
 Hail, ye plebeian underwood !  
 Where the poetic birds rejoice,  
 And for their quiet nests and plenteous food  
 Pay with their grateful voice.

Hail, the poor Muses' richest manor-seat !  
 Ye country-houses, and retreat,  
 Which all the happy gods so love,  
 That for you oft they quit their bright and great  
 Metropolis above.

Here Nature does a house for me erect,  
 Nature, the wisest architect,  
 Who those fond artists does despise  
 That can the fair and living trees neglect,  
 Yet the dead timber prize.

Here let me, careless and unthoughtful lying,  
 Hear the soft winds above me flying,  
 With all their wanton boughs dispute,  
 And the more tuneful birds to both replying,  
 Nor be myself, too, mute.

A silver stream shall roll his waters near,  
 Gilt with the sunbeams here and there :  
 On whose enamell'd bank I'll walk,  
 And see how prettily they smile, and hear  
 How prettily they talk.

We can quite understand what Pope meant when  
 he wrote of Cowley—

Who now reads Cowley ? If he pleases yet,  
 His moral pleases not his pointed wit.  
 Forgot his Epic, nay, Pindaric art,  
 But still I love the language of his heart.

Could Cowley have shaken off the trammels of the metaphysical school and, instead of aspiring to rival Pindar and Virgil, contented himself with the expression of his own natural genius, he might have been a really charming poet.

In passing from Cowley to Dryden, we pass to a poet of a very different temper. Of the beauties of Nature Dryden appears to have been absolutely insensible. If I am not mistaken, there is only one attempt at elaborate Nature-painting in the whole of his works, and it is a passage which for fustian and falsetto it would be difficult to beat :—

All things are hush'd, as Nature's self lay dead ;  
The mountains seem to nod their drowsy head ;  
The little birds, in dreams, their songs repeat,  
And sleeping flowers beneath the night-dew sweat.  
Even lust and envy sleep.

*Indian Emperor.*

It is remarkable that in the Epistle in Praise of a Country Life addressed to his kinsman John Dryden, there is not a single touch of natural description. Wherever, in translating or paraphrasing Virgil or Chaucer, he has to deal with such passages, he invariably spoils or falsifies them. All that can be said for him is that in one or two places he stumbles on a graphic touch, as in the *Annus Mirabilis*, 499-500 :—

So sicken waning moons too near the sun,  
And blunt their crescents on the edge of day.

As a rule, such tawdry rhetoric as the following serves his turn :—

Above our shady bowers  
The creeping jessamine thrusts her fragrant flowers ;  
The myrtle, orange, and the blushing rose,  
With bending heaps so nigh their blooms disclose,  
Each seems to swell the flavour which the other blows :  
By these the peach, the guava, and the pine,  
And, creeping 'twixt them all, the mantling vine  
Does round their trunks her purple clusters twine.

*State of Innocence, iii. 1.*

Dryden's indifference to inanimate nature is the more remarkable because his pictures of animals and their experiences, when he attempts them, are often as accurate as they are vivid, as in the following in the *Annus Mirabilis*, 520-28 :

So have I seen some fearful hare maintain  
A course, till tir'd, before the dog she lay :  
Who, stretch'd behind her, pants upon the plain,  
Past power to kill, as she to get away.

With his loll'd tongue he faintly licks his prey ;  
His warm breath blows her flix up as she lies ;  
She, trembling, creeps upon the ground away,  
And looks back to him with beseeching eyes.

Dryden, like Lucan and Juvenal, was pre-eminently a rhetorician, a man of robust but somewhat coarse temper, to whom facts and truths appealed not as they affected him æsthetically, but as they affected him intellectually and ethically. Nature was to him what it had always been to the poets of the school to which he belongs, and of which in our literature he was the typical representative.

## THE DESCRIPTIVE POETRY OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

IF we take a comprehensive view of the poetry dealing with Nature-painting during the eighteenth century in England and in the English language, it will be convenient to regard it as it found expression during what is commonly called the Augustan Age, that is, between 1700 and 1745, and as it expressed itself between that time and the appearance of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Its landmarks are easily discernible. We have first the purely conventional school the centre of which was Pope, prominent members of which were Gay, John Philips, Ambrose Philips, Tickell, and Savage. The model of Pope's one descriptive poem, *Windsor Forest*, was Denham's *Cooper's Hill* and the *Mosella* of Ausonius. Gay followed Pope, adding nothing. John Philips in his *Cyder* imitated Virgil's *Georgics*, and wrote about Nature chiefly because Virgil had written about it. Ambrose Philips conceived that he was imitating Theocritus, and Tickell and Savage were more or less conventional in their treatment and

certainly added no new elements. Lady Anne Winchester has been singled out by Wordsworth for special notice, because of the touches of vivid realism in one of her poems, *The Nocturnal Reverie*, but these touches are few and confined to that poem. But the *Winter* of Thomson, which, appearing in 1726, was followed by the other Seasons between that date and 1730, struck a new note, and initiated the most important era in the whole history of Nature-description in verse. Before the work was completed he had found an imitator in Mallet, whose *Excursion* appeared in 1728, and it may be safely said that half the purely descriptive poetry of the eighteenth century either took its ply from Thomson or was more or less affected by him. In the very year in which Thomson's *Winter* appeared, appeared a poem heralding the advent of another descriptive poet who had as little in common as Thomson had with the conventional school. This poem was *Grongar Hill*, by John Dyer. This he afterwards followed with the *Ruins of Rome* and the *Fleece*. In the *Fleece* natural description was subordinate to a most prosaic theme, but Dyer taken altogether stands with Thomson at the head of the descriptive poets in the first half of the eighteenth century. But in the very midst of the Augustan Age an important note had been struck, if struck faintly. In Parnell as the author of the *Hymn to Contentment* and more particularly the *Night-Piece on Death*, and in Matthew Green, we catch a new strain, or rather a



variant of Milton's note in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, but which in any case anticipated a subsequent important development of descriptive poetry. By Akenside and Armstrong, in both of whom we discern something of a feeling for Nature, natural description was, as with their classical archetypes, Lucretius and Manilius, purely subordinate to their themes and didactic purpose, and employed only as embroidery.

After the death of Thomson in 1748 we find a great advance in descriptive poetry. Two years before had appeared the Odes of Collins, in which the note struck so faintly by Parnell and Green not only vibrated in fullest tone, but one of the most exquisite varieties of descriptive poetry was fully initiated. With the *Ode to Evening* and the *Ode on the Death of Thomson*, written two years later, what Arnold calls natural magic came into our poetry. Gray, with less inspiration but with sensibility as exquisite, followed in 1749 with the *Ode on the Prospect of Eton College*, and in 1750 with the *Elegy*.

By Smart in his *Hop-Garden*, by Dodsley in his *Agriculture*, and by Grainger in his *Sugar-Cane*, natural description was employed to enliven the more prosaic species of poetry fashionable in this century. John Gilbert Cooper, in the second book of his *Power of Harmony*, had shown himself no unworthy disciple of Thomson.

In 1762 its bounds were enlarged by Falconer,



whose *Shipwreck* initiated a new species of this poetry by elaborating what had before been incidental. Two years later appeared Goldsmith's *Traveller*, which struck again, though with infinitely more power and complexity, the note which Addison had struck sixty years before. Two years after the *Traveller* came *The Deserted Village*, a new revelation in descriptive poetry.

But one of the most interesting varieties of this poetry sprang directly out of the revolution effected by Kent, Brown, and their disciples in landscape-gardening. The leader of this school was William Mason, whose *English Garden* is to poetry what the most representative works of these artists were to the pleasures of the aristocracy of these times. And this impressed a peculiar characteristic on descriptive poetry, reflected successively in Shenstone *passim*, in Lyttelton's *Blenheim*, in Langhorne's *Studley Park*, and in Cowper's *Task*.

By Langhorne and Beattie new elements were imported into it. Both anticipated Wordsworth by insisting on the educational power of Nature, the one by moralising and deducing lessons from it, the other by representing it as the nursery of genius and virtue. But this enthusiasm for Nature, which, as early as 1740, had found passionate expression in Joseph Warton's *Enthusiast*, had led to protests on the part of the older school. In a singularly interesting poem by William Whitehead, the poet laureate between 1758 and 1785, having, possibly from design, the same title, he represents Reason rebuking one who would renounce man and

social life for Nature. "Begone, vile world," says the *Enthusiast*—

Begone, vile world : the learn'd, the wise,  
The great, the busy I despise,  
And pity e'en the gay.

These, these are joys alone, I cry ;  
'Tis here, divine Philosophy,  
Thou deign'st to set thy throne.  
Here Contemplation points the road  
Through Nature's charms to Nature's God,  
These, these are joys alone.

Adieu, ye vain low-thoughted cares,  
Ye human hopes, ye human fears ;  
Ye pleasures and ye pains.

But Reason replies that man was made for man :

The fair variety of things  
Are merely life's refreshing springs  
To soothe him on his way.

Meanwhile, Nature-painting had been progressing apace. Joseph Warton had followed up the *Enthusiast* with other poems in the same strain. His brother Thomas had followed in his footsteps, and if his note had been somewhat academic, it had been genuine.

In 1765 Jago had made Edgehill and the prospect from it the theme of the most elaborate local poem which had yet appeared in our language. About the same time, though the poem was published some years later, John Scott had made Amwell the subject of a poem which was no unworthy anticipation of what Cowper was to do for Weston. In 1783 appeared

Crabbe's *Village*, and in 1788 Crowe's *Lewesdon Hill*. The next year appeared the first instalment of Bowles' Sonnets, which undoubtedly mark an era in descriptive poetry, though they scarcely imported into it any distinctly new elements.

The descriptive poetry of the first part of the eighteenth century has scarcely any intrinsic value, with the exception of that produced by Thomson, Dyer, and Collins. The interest of that produced during the second part is chiefly historical: it lies in its anticipation, faint it must be owned and feeble, of what the poets of the fuller day of the revolutionary period developed and matured. But it may be said with truth that, in an embryonic form, almost all the elements entering into the composition of that poetry may be distinctly traced. We have Wordsworth, we have Coleridge, we have Scott, we have Shelley, we have Byron, we have even Keats and Tennyson, in rude and crude adumbration. To study this poetry is to trace what is most charming and most powerful in modern masters to its sources. We are not concerned with doing that here, as our sole business is with Nature-poetry. Let a brief illustration of what has been said, confining itself strictly to the subject under consideration, suffice. So far as the mere materials of natural description are concerned, they had, as we have seen, been exhausted by the poets of the eighteenth century. They had presented Nature in all her forms and in all her aspects, in all her simple and native picturesqueness and

beauty, in the aspects she assumed when controlled and modified by art. They had painted her in broad, free fresco; they had painted her in miniature. Resolving her into her constituent parts, they had described with minute particularity her minutest objects. When Johnson observed, or rather makes Imlac in his *Rasselas* observe, that "the poet does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest," he does not seem to be aware that this was just what his contemporaries were beginning to do. Tennyson himself is no more microscopically observant than Scott of Amwell and Crabbe. Nor was this all. They had insisted on the educational power of Nature, on the moral discipline derived from close communion with her. They had felt and expressed her association with peace and joy, and had, like Wordsworth afterwards, both learnt and taught from the contemplation of her the cheerful faith

That all that we behold is full of blessings.

Keats, when he wrote, in the well-known lines in *Sleep and Poetry*, of the later seventeenth and the eighteenth century poets,

Ah, dismal-soul'd !  
 The winds of heaven blew, the ocean roll'd  
 Its gathering waves—ye felt it not. The blue  
 Bared its eternal bosom and the dew  
 Of summer nights collected still to make  
 The morning precious : beauty was awake !  
 Why were ye not awake ? But ye were dead  
 To things ye knew not of,

however it may apply to the poetry typical of the Augustan Age, most certainly does not apply to the descriptive poetry typical of the latter half of the century.

How is it, then, that the Nature-poetry of the eighteenth century ceases to appeal to us, and has been so completely superseded by that of the nineteenth century? The question is easily answered. It is one thing to initiate, it is another thing to perfect; it is one thing to work in shackles and in the dark, quite another thing to work untrammelled and in the light. The poets of the eighteenth century were clogged and encumbered with traditions and surroundings eminently unpropitious to the study and treatment of Nature. They lived in an age of commonplaces, conventionality, and prose, their interests being typified by such themes as many of them chose even as occasions for their homage to Nature. One, as we have seen, expounded the art of preserving health, another celebrated hop-gardens, another the production of sugar, and one of the most inspired of them the breeding of sheep and the manufacture of woollen. Their style, in addition to being as a rule diffuse and cumbrous, was not merely artificial, but artificial in the worst sense of the term, deformed by the falsetto of pseudo-classicism and by the falsetto of an absurdly stilted phraseology, at once trivial and pompous. An indiscriminating realism, with a tendency to dwell unduly on unimportant and insignificant particulars, marks their descriptions. What is in



the poetry of the nineteenth century—in that of Wordsworth and Shelley, for instance—the suffusion of the divine and spiritual element, is in theirs mere conventional Christianity. There are, however, exceptions to this, as notably in Thomson's *Hymn* appended to the *Seasons*, but such exceptions are rare. Save here and there, as in Collins, for example, no imagination and no fancy modify the laborious accumulation of particulars which commonly make up their landscapes. But perhaps their greatest defect as painters of Nature is that with very few exceptions, notably Collins and Gray, they had not discovered the secret of which Tennyson was such a consummate master, namely, that onomatopœia, in other words, that rhythm and word-sounds are to descriptive poetry what colours are in a painting. It is by a double appeal—an appeal to the ear as well as by an appeal to the mind—that such poetry produces its effect. It is here that Thomson fails, and this is one of the reasons why his descriptions, even when his epithets and choice of phrase are in themselves felicitously graphic, so often leave us unsatisfied.

The poets of the nineteenth century worked under very different conditions. The old impediments had been removed: all was light, freedom, emancipation. In nothing was this more apparent than in the change which came over descriptive poetry. Purged of the dross of a prosaic age, and cleared of the old lumber of Augustan and pseudo-classical tradition, it “sprang



upward like a pyramid of fire." It became penetrated with enthusiasm and power. With a brilliance and vividness never before approached, Scott painted Nature in her superbest and most picturesque forms. In Wordsworth it was not Nature's semblance but Nature herself that found expression, and Nature in almost all her aspects, and in almost all her moods. In a sphere more restricted the same may be said with literal truth of Coleridge. Byron was a more doubtful votary, but if at his worst he is a splendid rhetorician, at his best he is the trumpet voice of storm and mountain and cataract. It is no figure of speech to say that Shelley became her very harp. Keats caught her witchery, and may we not say that in Tennyson were blended all that distinguished these poets? In the nineteenth century, indeed, descriptive poetry in all its branches was carried to a perfection which it has never attained before, either in our own or in any other literature in the world.

## POPE AND THE MINOR POETS OF THE AUGUSTAN AGE

IN or about 1700, Pope's father removed from London to a house at Binfield near Wokingham in Berkshire, in the midst of the tract known as the Royal Hunt, the poet then being a child in his thirteenth or fourteenth year. It was here that his genius awoke, and it was here that he educated himself, and it was here that all his early poems were written. The house, of which nothing now remains but one room—according to tradition, Pope's study—stood on the highest ground, commanding on all sides most extensive and picturesque views. From it can be seen the open heaths lying around Ascot, the undulating bosky ranges of hills towards Windsor, and on the horizon, blue in the distance, the Oxfordshire hills as they descend to the river above Marlowe. Since Pope's time much of the timber has been cut down, and what was then a woody solitude has, in many places, and particularly in the immediate neighbourhood of the house, been built over. Still, however, a row of stately Scotch firs, on which Pope's

eye must often have rested, remains to illustrate his description of his home :—

A little house with trees a-row,  
And, like its master, very low.

Here, suggested to the young poet by Denham's *Cooper's Hill*, but inspired by the scene which was every day before him, *Windsor Forest* was written. As we stand where he stood, however commonplace it may be, we at least recognise the general truth of the description :—

Here hills and vales, the woodland and the plain,  
Here earth and water seem to strive again ;  
Not chaos-like together crushed and bruis'd,  
But, as the world, harmoniously confus'd :  
Where order in variety we see,  
And where, though all things differ, all agree ;  
Here waving groves a chequer'd scene display,  
And part admit and part exclude the day.

There, interspers'd in lawns and op'ning glades,  
Thin trees arise that shun each other's shades.  
Here in full light the russet plains extend,  
There, wrapt in clouds the blueish hills ascend.  
E'en the wild heath displays her purple dyes,  
And midst the desert fruitful fields arise,  
That, crown'd with tufted trees and springing corn,  
Like verdant isles the sable waste adorn.

The minute care with which he had studied natural objects is apparent throughout the whole poem in the well-known description of the death of the pheasant, in the epithets he applies to the various tributaries of the

Thames, and in his characterisation of the fish found in them.

The silver eel in shining volumes roll'd

is most happy. The only other passage in his poems, besides what has been quoted from *Windsor Forest*, displaying any sense of the picturesque in Nature is in *Eloisa to Abelard*, where the modern note of subjectivity infusing natural objects with sentiment is effective :—

The darksome pines that o'er yon rocks reclin'd  
Wave high, and murmur to the hollow wind,  
The wand'ring streams that shine between the hills,  
The grotts that echo to the tinkling rills,  
The dying gales that pant upon the trees,  
The lakes that quiver to the curling breeze ;  
No more these scenes my meditation aid,  
Or lull to rest the visionary maid.  
But o'er the twilight groves and dusky caves,  
Long-sounding aisles and intermingled graves,  
Black Melancholy sits, and round her throws  
A deathlike silence and a dead repose :  
Her gloomy presence saddens all the scene,  
Shades ev'ry flower and darkens ev'ry green,  
Deepens the murmur of the falling floods,  
And breathes a browner horror on the woods.

That Pope had a feeling for Nature is abundantly evident from his prose correspondence, in which he not infrequently gave the rein to such descriptions, which he seems to have thought more appropriate for prose than for poetry. In his poetry, indeed, he speaks contemptuously, like Horace, of "pure description," holding "the place of sense." And indeed his poetry,







like his famous grotto, owed much more to art than to nature.

Perhaps the most favourable specimen which can be quoted from his disciple Gay is the following evening scene from *Rural Sports* :—

Or when the ploughman leaves the task of day,  
And, trudging homeward, whistles on his way :  
When the big-udder'd cows with patience stand,  
Waiting the strokings of the damsel's hand,  
No warbling cheers the woods : the feathered choir  
To court kind slumbers to their sprays retire ;  
When no rude gale disturbs the sleeping trees,  
Nor aspen leaves confess the gentlest breeze ;

Far in the deep the sun his glory hides,  
A streak of gold the sea and sky divides ;  
The purple clouds their amber lining show,  
And, edg'd with flame, rolls every wave below.

Over Garth's *Claremont*, which, like Pope's *Windsor Forest*, was suggested by Denham's poem, as it contains very little description, we need not pause, nor need a word be said about any of the Pastorals from Pope's to Gay's, from Gay's to Scott of Amwell's, or about Ambrose Philips's once celebrated *Epistle from Copenhagen*, a winter-piece which Pope pronounced to be noble, or about the local scenes sketched in John Philips's *Cyder*—for nothing could be more commonplace. Somerville's *Chase* deserves a passing notice, for, verbose and prolix though most of it is, it abounds in vivid pictures drawn with enthusiasm from the hunting-fields. Tickell, Addison's friend, has in the artificial style of the age

given a really charming picture of the grounds of Warwick House, consecrated by the memory of his master—

Thou hill, whose brow the antique structures grace,  
 Rear'd by bold chiefs of Warwick's noble race;  
 Why, once so lov'd, when'er thy bower appears,  
 O'er my dim eyeballs glance the sudden tears?  
 How sweet were once thy prospects, fresh and fair,  
 Thy sloping walks, and unpolluted air!  
 How sweet the glooms beneath thy aged trees,  
 Thy noontide shadow, and thine evening breeze!  
 His image thy forsaken bowers restore:  
 Thy walks and airy prospects charm no more;  
 No more the summer in thy glooms allay'd,  
 Thy evening breezes, and thy noontide shade.

But over two of the minor poets of this age, in which description had quite a subordinate place, we must pause—Thomas Parnell and Matthew Green. Parnell, so intimately associated with Pope and Swift, is of course generally known by the *Hermit*, but among his poems are two—the *Night-Piece on Death* and *A Hymn to Contentment*—which in their union of sentiment with description anticipate Gray. Certainly a high place among the descriptive poets of his age must be assigned to the following passage from the first poem:—

How deep yon azure dyes the sky!  
 Where orbs of gold unnumber'd lie;  
 While through their ranks, in silver pride,  
 The nether crescent seems to glide.  
 The slumbering breeze forgets to breathe,  
 The lake is smooth and clear beneath,  
 Where once again the spangled show  
 Descends to meet our eyes below.

The grounds, which on the right aspire,  
 In dimness from the view retire :  
 The left presents a place of graves  
 Whose wall the silent water laves.  
 That steeple guides thy doubtful sight  
 Among the livid gleams of night.

Those graves, with bending osier bound,  
 That nameless heave the crumbled ground.

It will be seen that Gray took from this last line one of the most graphic touches of description in the *Elegy* :—

Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap.

Parnell stands quite alone among the poets of his age—it will be remembered that he was born in 1679 and died in 1718—in striking this note.

To find Matthew Green singled out for a place among descriptive poets may seem very surprising to those who only know him generally in connection with his singularly original poem *The Spleen*. And yet he is fairly entitled to such a place. *The Spleen* is one of the most delightful and original poems in the English language : it is indeed thick-sown with unforgettable couplets. Where have scribblers in verse been so happily touched off as in the couplet—

Who buzz in rhyme, and, like blind flies,  
 Err with their wings for want of eyes.

How good in their various ways are—

And when he can't prevent foul play,  
Enjoys the folly of the fray.

Nor runs, with wisdom's Sirens caught,  
On quicksands swallowing shipwrecked thought.

A stranger into life I'm come,  
Dying may be our going home,  
Transported here by angry Fate,  
The convicts of a prior state.

Though pleased to see the dolphins play,  
I mind my compass and my way.

Nor bigots, who but one way see,—  
Through blinkers of authority.

Or where he says of himself—

In life's rough tide I sunk not down,  
But swam, till Fortune threw a rope,  
Buoyant on bladders fill'd with hope.

But our business is with its touches of natural description, and they lie in touches and in little cameos rather than in elaborated pictures. How charming is the following :—

May my humble dwelling stand  
Upon some chosen spot of land :  
A pond before full to the brim,  
Where cows may cool, and geese may swim ;  
Behind, a green, like velvet neat,  
Soft to the eye and to the feet,  
Where odorous plants in evening fair  
Breathe all around ambrosial air.

Where the half-cirque, which vision bounds,  
Like amphitheatre surrounds :  
And woods impervious to the breeze,







Thick phalanx of embodied trees ;  
 From hills through plains in dusk array  
 Extended far, repel the day ;  
 Here stillness, height, and solemn shade  
 Invite, and contemplation aid :

And dreams beneath the spreading beech  
 Inspire, and docile fancy teach ;  
 While soft as breezy breath of wind  
 Impulses rustle through the mind.

There see the clover, pea, and bean  
 Vie in variety of green ;  
 Fresh pastures speckled o'er with sheep,  
 Brown fields their fallow Sabbaths keep ;  
 Plump Ceres golden tresses wear,  
 And poppy top-knots deck her hair,  
 And silver streams through meadows stray,  
 And Naiads on the margin play,  
 And lesser nymphs on side of hills,  
 From plaything urns pour down the rills.

Few poets—and a real poet Green was, finely touched and finely tempered—stole through life so noiselessly, all that is known of him practically being that he was born in 1696, was a Dissenter, probably a Quaker, had some appointment in the Custom-House, and died in his forty-second year at a lodging in Nag's-head Court, Gracechurch Street, in 1737. Pope and Goldsmith recognised his merits ; and Gray, who has borrowed more than one happy expression from him, said of his poetry : "There is wit everywhere. Reading would have formed his judgment and harmonised his ear, for even his wood-notes often break out into strains of real poetry and music." To general readers

Green is not known so well as he ought to be, but it would be difficult to imagine any one who loves good things who would not be grateful for an introduction to him.

A word in passing must be said for Richard Savage, whose melancholy story Johnson has told so pathetically. His *Wanderer* was published in 1729. It abounds with laboured pictures of natural objects, and its delineation of landscape is, though too conventional, not without picturesqueness.

Two short extracts must suffice. One is a sunset sky :—

Near down th' etherial steep  
The lamp of day hangs hovering o'er the deep.  
Dun shades, in rocky shapes up ether roll'd,  
Project long, shaggy points, deep-ting'd with gold.  
Others take faint th' unripen'd cherry's dye,  
And paint amusing landscapes on the eye.  
Their blue-veil'd yellow, through a sky serene  
In swelling mixture forms a floating green,  
Streak'd through white clouds a mild vermilion shines,  
And the breeze freshens, as the heat declines.

*Wanderer, Canto V.*

The other a mountain winter scene :—

On this bleak height tall firs, with ice-work crown'd,  
Bend, while their flaky winter shades the ground :  
Hoarse and direct a blustering north wind blows,  
On boughs, thick-rustling, crack the crisped snows,  
Tangles of frost half fright the wilder'd eye  
By heat oft blacken'd like a lowering sky.  
Hence down the side two turbid rivulets pour,  
And devious two, in one huge cataract roar.

Yon rocks in rough assemblage rush in view,  
 In form an amphitheatre they rise,  
 And a dark gulf in their broad centre lies.

Close with this stage a precipice combines,  
 Whence still the spacious country far declines;  
 The herds seem insects in the distant glades,  
 And men diminish'd, as at noon their shades.

Canto I.

Cumbrous but faithful.

## THOMSON AND DYER

In Thomson and Dyer we come to the more elaborate Nature-painters of the eighteenth century. As it is the object of this work to localise descriptions as much as possible, and so to associate them directly with the personal surroundings of the several poets, it is not necessary to enter into any general account of these two poets, but to deal with them almost entirely in relation to what may be called the topical element in their poetry.

James Thomson, the son of a Scotch Presbyterian minister, was born at Ednam in Roxburghshire, in September 1700, a place the surroundings of which are flat and uninteresting. But some two months after the poet's birth his father removed to Southdean, a larger parish near Jedburgh in the same county. This was a most picturesque spot. The manse nestled at the foot of Southdean Law, and fine and noble was the

scenery around it. It was here that Thomson was introduced to Nature and derived his earliest inspiration. In *Autumn* the scene which met his eyes is described in a more or less generalised description of Scotland :—

Here awhile the Muse,  
High-hovering o'er the broad cerulean scene,  
Sees Caledonia in romantic view :  
Her airy mountains, from the waving main,  
Invested with a keen diffusive sky,  
Breathing the soul acute ; her forests huge  
Incult, robust, and tall, by Nature's hand  
Planted of old ; her azure lakes between,  
Poured out extensive, and of wat'ry wealth  
Full ; winding deep, and green, her fertile vales ;  
With many a cool, translucent, brimming flood  
Washed lovely, from the Tweed (pure parent stream,  
Whose pastoral banks first heard my Doric reed,  
With, sylvan Jed, thy tributary brook)  
To where the north-inflated tempest foams  
O'er Orca's<sup>1</sup> or Berubium's<sup>2</sup> highest peak.

Some of the winter scenes at the beginning of the poem describing that season were plainly drawn from what he had often witnessed here. In 1725 he came up to London ; next year *Winter* appeared, and between that date and 1730, *Spring*, *Summer*, and *Autumn*, the collected poems being published, with the last instalment and with the closing Hymn, under the title of *The Seasons*, in 1730.

The revisions were many and important, the most remarkable being embodied in an interleaved copy of the edition of 1738, from which the current text is

<sup>1</sup> The Orkneys.

<sup>2</sup> The Cape of St. Andrew.









printed, some of the most felicitous alterations and additions being attributed to Pope. The *Seasons* are full of local pictures drawn from scenes with which Thomson was familiar, such as Hagley, the seat of Lord Lyttelton, thus described in *Spring* :—

Through Hagley Park you stray,  
Thy British Tempe! There along the dale,  
With woods o'erhung and shagg'd with mossy rocks,  
Whence on each hand the gushing waters play,  
And down the rough cascade white dashing fall,  
Or gleam in lengthened vista through the trees,  
You silent steal; or sit beneath the shade  
Of solemn oaks that tuft the swelling mounts  
Thrown graceful round by Nature's careless hand,  
And pensive listen to the various voice  
Of rural peace: the herds, the flocks, the birds,  
The hollow-whispering breeze, the plaint of rills  
That, purling down amid the twisted roots  
Which creep around, their dewy murmurs shake  
On the soothed ear.

Then, referring to the view from the higher grounds in Hagley Park, and the house itself, he continues :—

Meanwhile you gain the height, from whose fair brow  
The bursting prospect spreads immense around:  
And, snatch'd o'er hill and dale, and wood and lawn,  
And verdant field, and darkening heath between,  
And villages embosom'd soft in trees,  
And spiry towns by surging columns marked  
Of household smoke, your eye excursive roams;  
Wide-stretching from the Hall, in whose kind haunt  
The Hospitable Genius lingers still,  
To where the broken landscape, by degrees  
Ascending, roughens into rigid hills;  
O'er which the Cambrian mountains, like far clouds  
That skirt the blue horizon, dusky rise.

Another spot well known to him was Bubb Dodington's seat at Eastbury, in Dorsetshire, which he describes with laboured infelicity in *Autumn* :—

Oh, lose me in the green delightful walks  
Of, Dodington, thy seat, serene and plain ;  
Where simple Nature reigns, and every view,  
Diffusive, spreads the pure Dorsetian downs  
In boundless prospect ; yonder shagg'd with wood,  
Here rich with harvest, and there white with flocks !

New beauties rise with each revolving day,  
New columns swell, and still the fresh Spring finds  
New plants to quicken and new groves to green.

Here, as I steal along the sunny wall,  
Where Autumn basks, with fruit empurpled deep,  
My pleasing theme continual prompts my thought :  
Presents the downy peach ; the shining plum,  
With a fine bluish mist of animals  
Clouded ; the ruddy nectarine ; and, dark  
Beneath his ample leaf, the luscious fig.

Stowe, then the seat of Lord Cobham, was also visited by Thomson, and found in him its laureate. But the glories of Stowe are things of the past, and as Thomson's description has not much intrinsic merit or interest it may be passed without citation. Let us now pass to the place where Thomson passed the last twelve years of his life, where he revised the *Seasons*, introducing many a touch drawn from what he daily saw, and where he breathed his last. It was a cottage in Kew Foot Lane, at Richmond, looking down upon the Thames and commanding the distant landscape ;

behind this was his garden. For many years this most interesting memorial of the poet was piously preserved. After his death the cottage and grounds were purchased by a Mr. Ross, who, though he enlarged both, was most careful to preserve both. Then, after becoming the property of the Hon. Francis Boscawen, it passed into the hands of the Earl of Shaftesbury, who built a villa on the site of it, but, for the sake of preserving it, incorporated the cottage, making it the vestibule of his villa. When Howitt visited it about 1846, the room which Thomson used was still intact, a plain mahogany Pembroke belonging to him standing where it stood when he sat at it, with this inscription on it:—

On this table James Thomson constantly wrote. It was therefore purchased of his servant, who also gave these brass hooks on which his hat and cane were hung in this his sitting-room.

The garden, too, was carefully preserved, together with all its trees, as well as the alcove in which Thomson so often sat, a simple wooden structure with a plain back and two outward sloping sides and a bench running round it, the only thing changed being its position. Within the last few years everything has been swept away by the vandalism characteristic of the last half-century. It is now part of the Royal Hospital, the only trace of the old place being a part of the entrance-hall and possibly the private apartment of the matron of the institution, and the

garden, but alcove and every other souvenir have vanished.

What could then be seen from Thomson's "rural domain," as he called it, and can now be seen from the prospect, he describes in *Summer* :—

Shall we ascend,  
While radiant Summer opens all its pride,  
Thy hill, delightful Shene? Here let us sweep  
The boundless landscape: now the raptur'd eye,  
Exulting swift, to huge Augusta<sup>1</sup> send,  
Now to the sister-hills<sup>2</sup> that skirt her plain,  
To lofty Harrow now, and now to where  
Majestic Windsor lifts his princely brow.  
In lovely contrast to this glorious view,  
Calmly magnificent, then will we turn  
To where the silver Thames first rural grows.  
There let the feasted eye unwearied stray;  
Luxurious, there, rove through the pendent woods  
That nodding hang o'er Harrington's retreat;  
And, stooping thence to Ham's embowering walks.

Slow let us trace the matchless vale of Thames,  
Fair-winding up to where the Muses haunt  
In Twickenham's bowers,

O vale of bliss! O softly swelling hills!

Heav'ns! what a goodly prospect spreads around  
Of hills, and dales, and woods, and lawns, and spires,  
And glittering towns, and gilded streams, till all  
The stretching landscape into smoke decays!

The *Seasons*, it must be admitted, does not hold the same place in modern estimation as it did in that of our forefathers. It is a poem heavily clogged with

<sup>1</sup> London.

<sup>2</sup> Highgate and Hampstead.

diffuse commonplace, and still more intolerable didactic platitudes. Its versification is frequently harsh and cumbrous, its diction vicious; it is a poem with very little imagination and with no architecture. But Thomson was an inspired poet: he had true enthusiasm. To the student of Nature the poem must always be a delight, so minutely accurate, fresh, and original are his pictures. "Gray," says Nicholls in his *Reminiscences*, "thought Thomson had one talent beyond all other poets, that of describing the various appearances of Nature," adding that "he failed when he ventured to step out of this path" (Gray's *Letters*, Ed. Tovey, vol. ii. p. 280). Let us take him, that we may leave him, at his best; but even here he occasionally jars on us:—

The meek-eyed morn appears, mother of dews,  
At first faint-gleaming in the dappled east;  
Till far o'er ether spreads the widening glow,  
And from before the lustre of her face  
White breaks the clouds away. With quickened step  
Brown night retires. Young day pours in apace,  
And opens all the lawny prospect wide.  
The dripping rock, the mountain's misty top  
Swell on the sight, and brighten with the dawn.  
Blue through the dusk the smoking currents shine;  
And from the bladed field the fearful hare  
Limps awkward; while along the forest glade  
The wild deer trip, and, often turning, gaze  
At early passenger.

There is rich beauty in the following:—

Gay castles in the clouds that pass  
For ever flushing round a summer sky;



and magic in the picture of the Hebrides,

Plac'd far amid the melancholy main.

The minute accuracy of his observation is illustrated by his description in *Winter* of the earlier stage in the freezing of water :

An icy gale, oft shifting, o'er the pool  
Breathes a blue film and in its mid career  
Arrests the bickering stream.

These are typical, and the work of which these are typical has in it the elements of permanence.

Thomson was fortunate in his theme ; not so the poet who comes next to him in power of description. "If," wrote Wordsworth to Lady Beaumont, "you have not read *The Fleece*, do so. The character of Dyer as a patriot, a citizen, and a tender-hearted friend of humanity was in some respects injurious to him as a poet, and has induced him to dwell upon processes which, however important in themselves, were unsusceptible of being poetically treated. Accordingly his poem is in several places dry and heavy, but its beauties are innumerable and of a high order. In point of imagination and purity of style I am not sure that he is not superior to any writer in verse since Milton."

The poet of whom Wordsworth wrote this was born, most probably in Carmarthenshire, in or about 1700. After abandoning the law, to which he was bred, he became an artist, studying under Jonathan Richardson. In 1724 he went to Rome for the



purposes of his profession, and there gathered the materials for his *Ruins of Rome*, published some time afterwards. In 1726 he returned to England, and in the same year published in a miscellany the first draft of *Grongar Hill* and *The Country Walk*. Later in life he was ordained, and finally settled at Coningsby, in Lincolnshire, where he wrote *The Fleece*, which appeared in 1757, the year before he died.

Dyer has left three poems, each in different styles and each in their way memorable: *Grongar Hill*, which is an elaborate rural picture; *The Ruins of Rome*, which is a study in the picturesque blended with ethical sentiment; and *The Fleece*, which is a technically didactic poem embroidered with much local Nature-painting. *Grongar Hill*, the first in date and the first in charm, was in its mature shape evolved from some verses in the heroic couplet written in his sixteenth year, and again recast and revised from an irregular ode which appeared in Savage's *Miscellany*. The site from which Dyer contemplated the scene which he so vividly described may be almost exactly identified, for if it is not precisely marked by the blackthorn to which tradition points, it must have been close by it. It is perhaps the loveliest and most picturesque scene in South Wales, commanding a comprehensive prospect of the vale of the Towy. In Gilpin's *Observations on the Wye* will be found an admirable critical commentary on the poem, which is discussed locally from the point of view of a landscape artist. The poem begins, it

must be owned, very badly, because of the awkwardness of the diction involving both obscurity and a grammatical blunder :—

Silent Nymph, with curious eye,  
Who the purple evening lie  
On the mountain's lonely van.

Indeed, the whole of the opening is cumbrous and lame, but amends are soon made. The descriptions are so detailed and exact that one or two notes are all that are needed by way of commentary.

Now I gain the mountain's brow,  
What a landscape lies below !<sup>1</sup>  
No clouds, no vapours intervene,  
But the gay and open scene  
Does the face of Nature show  
In all the hues of Heaven's bow ;  
And, swelling to embrace the light,  
Spreads around beneath the sight.

Old castles<sup>2</sup> on the cliffs arise,  
Proudly towering in the skies !  
Rushing from the woods, the spires  
Seem from hence ascending fires !  
Half his beams Apollo sheds  
On the yellow mountain heads !  
Gilds the fleeces of the flocks,  
And glitters on the broken rocks !

Below me trees unnumber'd rise,<sup>3</sup>  
Beautiful in various dyes :  
The glossy pine, the poplar blue,  
The yellow beech, the sable yew,

<sup>1</sup> The prospect from the summit of Grongar Hill.

<sup>2</sup> Castle Kilkenny, Castle Carrig, Dinevawr Castle, Drusloun Castle.

<sup>3</sup> A very accurate description of the wood below the hill.

The slender fir, that taper grows,  
 The sturdy oak, with broad-spread boughs.  
 And beyond the purple grove,  
 Haunt of Phyllis, Queen of Love!  
 Gaudy as the opening dawn  
 Lies a long and level lawn,  
 On which a dark hill, steep and high,<sup>1</sup>  
 Holds and charms the wandering eye!  
 Deep are his feet in Towy's flood,  
 His sides are clothed with waving wood,  
 And ancient towers crown his brow,  
 That cast an awful look below;  
 Whose ragged walls the ivy creeps  
 And with her arms from falling keeps.

And see the rivers, how they run  
 Thro' woods and meads, in shade and sun,  
 Sometimes swiftly, sometimes slow,  
 Wave succeeding wave, they go.

Ever charming, ever new,  
 When will the landscape tire the view!  
 The fountain's fall, the river's flow,  
 The wooded valleys, warm and low,  
 The windy summit, wild and high  
 Roughly rushing on the sky!

See, on the mountain's southern side,  
 Where the prospect opens wide,  
 Where the evening gilds the tide,  
 How close and small the hedges lie!  
 What streaks of meadow cross the eye!  
 A step, methinks, may pass the stream,  
 So little distant dangers seem.

*The Country Walk*, though minutely detailed and proving close and accurate observation, is more common-

<sup>1</sup> This is Dinevawr, or possibly Newton Castle.

place. In *The Ruins of Rome* the note is more rhetorical, but the pictures are vivid :—

The rising sun  
Flames on the ruins, in the purer air  
Towering aloft.

Or again—

The setting sun displays  
His visible great round between yon towers,  
As through two shady cliffs.

And certainly the poem contains one of the finest onomatopœic effects in our language, to say nothing of the fine imaginative power of the passage :—

The pilgrim oft  
At dead of night, 'mid his orison hears  
Aghast the voice of Time, disparting towers,  
Tumbling all precipitate down-dash'd,  
Rattling around, loud thund'ring to the moon.

The descriptive passages in *The Fleece* have all the excellence of the particular kind indicated by Wordsworth. Take a typical passage—all who are acquainted with the parts of England here described will recognise the accuracy of the picture :—

Such the spacious plain  
Of Sarum, spread like Ocean's boundless round,  
Where solitary Stonehenge, gray with moss,  
Ruin of ages, nods : such, too, the leas  
And ruddy tilth, which spiry Ross beholds,  
From a green hillock, o'er her lofty elms ;  
And Lemster's brooky tract, and airy Croft ;  
And such Harleian Eyewood's swelling turf,  
Wav'd as the billows of a rolling sea :

And Shobden, for its lofty terrace famed,  
Which from a mountain's ridge, elate o'er woods  
And girt with all Siluria, sees around  
Regions on regions blended in the clouds.

*The Fleece* is, it must be owned, very heavy reading, "buried in woollen," as a contemporary critic wittily observed of its author; and as the descriptive passages are strictly subordinate to the didactic portion, their felicity lies rather in their terse and graphic force, such as—

Enormous rocks on rocks, in ever-wild  
Posture of falling.

And this description of a calm in the Tropics :—

The downy feather on the cordage hung,  
Moves not : the flat sea shines like yellow gold  
Fus'd in the fire.

Dyer is, indeed, a most pleasing poet, and few would dispute what Wordsworth has expressed in his Sonnet to him :—

A grateful few, shall love thy modest Lay,  
Long as the shepherd's bleating flock shall stray,  
Long as the thrush shall pipe on Grongar Hill !

AKENSIDE, ARMSTRONG, SHENSTONE,  
GRAINGER, MALLET, AND SMOLLETT

THERE is little to detain us in Akenside and Armstrong, who are rather rhetoricians than poets, and yet *The Pleasures of the Imagination* is in some respects a memorable poem, and at times not without the note of nobility, and *The Art of Preserving Health* deserves more readers than it finds. Natural description in Akenside is strictly subordinated to his didactic purpose. He was born in November 1721, at Newcastle-on-Tyne, and in a fragment of an intended Fourth Book to his chief poem, written in the last year of his life, he thus refers, not without pathos, to the haunts of his youth :—

O ye dales  
Of Tyne, and ye most ancient woodlands ; where  
Oft as the giant flood obliquely strides,  
And his banks open and his lawns extend,  
Stops short the pleased traveller to view,  
Presiding o'er the scene, some rustic tower  
Founded by Norman or by Saxon hands :  
O ye Northumbrian shades, which overlook



The rocky pavement and the mossy falls  
 Of solitary Wensbeck's limpid stream !  
 How gladly I recall your well-known seats,  
 Belov'd of old, and that delightful time  
 When all alone, for many a summer's day,  
 I wandered through your calm recesses, led  
 In silence by some powerful hand unseen.

The two passages in his poem which are his most elaborate Nature-pictures are his description in the Second Book of the wild spot where the Genius who describes to him "the gracious ways of providence" confronts him, and the following passage in the Third Book, where he shows how man reads into Nature "the inexpressive semblance of himself, of thought and passion" :—

Mark the sable woods

That shade sublime yon mountain's nodding brow :  
 With what religious awe the solemn scene  
 Commands your steps ! as if the reverend form  
 Of Minos or of Numa should forsake  
 Th' Elysian seats, and down the embowering glade  
 Move to your pausing eye ! Behold the expanse  
 Of yon gay landscape, where the silver clouds  
 Flit o'er the heavens before the sprightly breeze :  
 Now their gay cincture skirts the doubtful sun ;  
 Now streams of splendour, through their opening veil  
 Effulgent, sweep from off the gilded lawn  
 The aerial shadows, on the curling brook,  
 And on the shady margin's quivering leaves  
 With quickest lustre glancing.

Armstrong's prosaic theme, with its subdivisions of "Air," "Diet," "Exercise," "The Passions," does not promise much poetry, and poetry we do not find, but his

touches of natural description have often distinction and even beauty ; such as

The horrors of the solemn wood  
While the soft evening saddens into night.

The sounding forest fluctuates in the storm.

The impending trees  
Stretch their extravagant arms athwart the gloom.

The tower that long had stood  
The crash of thunder and the warring winds.

The roughening deep expects the storm, as sure  
As red Orion mounts the shrouded heaven.

A purely didactic poem so essentially prosaic in its theme, sown with lines like these, is at least memorable. But when Armstrong attempts, as he does, in the First Book, a panoramic view of the scenery around London, he so often collapses, and collapses so dismally, into grotesque commonplace and bathos that it is impossible to quote him.

When Johnson observed of Shenstone that his pleasure was all in his eye, he pierced to the heart of the truth about him. His poetry has gone the way of his once famous Leasowes, which imitated Nature only to falsify it. The Leasowes, which is situated halfway down the descent from Hales-Owen, and is about four miles from Hagley in Herefordshire and seven from Birmingham, may still be seen in neglect and ruin ; his poems have still a place in the corpus of our national poets, but the life has gone out of them, and

only the curious turn to them. Two-thirds of his poetry is pure falsetto: at the best it is but pretty. His ambitious poetry is dulness incarnate. It is significant that the two best things which came from his pen are a sentence in Latin, inscribed on an urn dedicated to the memory of Miss Dolman, "Heu quanto minus est cum reliquis versari quam tui meminisse," and the cynical verses written in an Inn at Henley. If he possessed what he affected, an enthusiasm for Nature, it finds expression in one passage only; it is a stanza in a poem entitled *Rural Elegance*:—

Lo! not an hedgerow hawthorn blows,  
 Or humble harebell paints the plain,  
 Or valley winds, or fountain flows,  
 Or purple heath is ting'd in vain:  
 For such the rivers dash the foamy tides,  
 The mountain swells, the dale subsides;  
 E'en thriftless furze detains their wandering sight,  
 And the rough barren rock grows pregnant with delight.

This is his best Nature poem, and stands quite alone.

To Dr. James Grainger, the author of *Solitude*, a feeble ode ludicrously overpraised by Johnson, and the *Sugar-Cane*, a didactic poem on the theme indicated, a place among those who contributed to the Romantic movement belongs by courtesy. David Mallet, who is now remembered chiefly for his really beautiful ballad, *William and Margaret*, was as a descriptive poet, that is, as the author of *The Excursion*, published in 1728, and of a long narrative poem in

blank verse (1747), an imitator of Thomson, but has left no passage worth quoting. It is somewhat startling to find the author of *Peregrine Pickle* and of *Roderick Random* among the poets of Nature, and yet he has feelingly celebrated the charms of Leven Water :—

Pure stream, in whose transparent wave  
My youthful limbs I wont to lave ;  
No torrents stain thy limpid source,  
No rocks impede thy dimpling course,  
That sweetly warbles o'er its bed,  
With white, round, polish'd pebbles spread ;  
While, lightly pois'd, the scaly brood  
In myriads cleave thy crystal flood ;  
The springing trout in speckled pride,  
The salmon, monarch of the tide ;  
The ruthless pike, intent on war,  
The silver eel, and mottled par.  
Devolving from thy parent lake,  
A charming maze thy waters make,  
By bowers of birch, and groves of pine,  
And edges flowered with eglantine.

It is when we place a poem like this beside Wordsworth's *Lines to a Highland Girl* that we can measure the whole distance between the realism of the eighteenth century at its best and elements imported into that poetry by the genius of Romanticism.

## GOLDSMITH, COLLINS, AND GRAY

WE have now arrived at the three poets who are pre-eminent during the period which extends from the death of Pope to the appearance of Wordsworth and Coleridge, who have enriched our poetry with some of the most precious contributions which have ever been made to it, and who may be regarded in various ways and from different points of view as the initiators of modern poetry in some of its most exquisite manifestations. In dealing with them here it will be necessary to confine ourselves strictly to their descriptive poetry, and as far as possible to treat it in relation to the scenes which suggested and inspired it. In the case of Goldsmith and Gray this can be done fully and satisfactorily ; in the case of Collins this is not always easy.

Goldsmith marks with singular preciseness the transition from the poetry characteristic of the eighteenth century to that characteristic of the nineteenth, but he belongs much more to the first than to the second. His *Traveller* appeared in 1764.



his *Deserted Village* in 1770. Except in the infusion of sentiment, the world of *The Traveller* is the world of Addison's *Epistle from Italy* and Pope's *Windsor Forest*. The ethical element completely predominates over the scenic and picturesque. Simplicity and humanity are there, but there only occasionally. Man is contemplated not so much individually and in relation to himself as socially and politically. The style is pointed and epigrammatic, and has the note of rhetoric. But in *The Deserted Village* this is reversed. What is occasional and more or less accidental in the other poem is here ubiquitous and of the essence of the work. It is the heart speaking to the heart, and in essentials all as a rule is simplicity and nature; it is only here and there that the old falsetto jars on us. The politics of the poem spring out of its humanity.

It was well said by Campbell that "fiction in poetry is not the reverse of truth, but her soft and enchanted resemblance," and this ideal beauty of Nature has seldom been united with so much sober fidelity as in the groups and scenery of *The Deserted Village*. Macaulay complains that *The Deserted Village*, being as it is a picture blended from reminiscences of Lissoy and of some typical English village, presumably in Kent, is incongruous and unreal. It is fortunate for Macaulay that his reputation does not depend on his criticisms of poetry. There can be no doubt at all that Auburn was in the main drawn from Lissoy, where Goldsmith passed his boyhood, that it was founded on fact, and that its scenery and its







associations were those with which Goldsmith, when living at Lissoy, was familiar. This is placed beyond doubt by Dr. Streat—*he was the successor of Henry Goldsmith, the poet's brother, in the curacy of Kilkenny West—who in a letter to Edward Mangin, dated December 1807, writes as follows. The letter is quoted by Forster, but must be given here :—*

The poem of *The Deserted Village* took its origin from the circumstance of General Robert Napper (the grandfather of the gentleman who now lives in the house, within half a mile of Lissoy, and built by the General) having purchased an extensive tract of the country surrounding Lissoy or *Auburn*; in consequence of which many families here called colliers were removed to make room for the intended improvements of what was now to become the domain of a rich man, warm with the idea of changing the face of his new acquisition; and were forced “with fainting steps” to go in search of “torrid tracts” and “distant climes.” This fact alone might be supposed to establish the seat of the poem; but there cannot remain a doubt in any unprejudiced mind when the following are added, viz. that the character of the village preacher, the above-named Henry, is copied from nature. He is described exactly as he lived, and his “modest mansion” as it existed. Burn, the name of the village master, and the site of his school-house; and Catherine Giraghty, a lonely widow—

The wretched matron, forc'd in age for bread  
To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread—

(and to this day the brook and ditches near the spot where her cabin stood abound with cresses), still remain in the memory of the inhabitants, and Catherine's children live in the neighbourhood. The pool, the busy mill, the house “where nut-brown draughts inspired,” are still visited on the poetic scene; and the “hawthorn bush,” growing in an open space in front of the house, which I

knew to have three trunks, is now reduced to one; the other two having been cut, from time to time, by persons carrying pieces of it away to be made into toys, etc., in honour of the bard and of the celebrity of his poem. All these contribute to the same proof; and the "decent church," which I attended for upwards of eighteen years, and which "tops the neighbouring hill," is exactly described as seen from Lissoy, the residence of the preacher.

This was written only thirty-three years after Goldsmith's death, the position of the writer as curate of Kilkenny West and successor of Henry Goldsmith being sufficient guarantee for his accuracy. In or about 1846 William Howitt visited the place, and found it all ruins, squalor, and desolation. But there can be no doubt that as Goldsmith sat in his Chambers at Brick Court, with anxieties and difficulties accumulating round him, and death not so very far away, his memory wandered back to these early scenes. "Whatever vicissitudes we experience in life"—he had written some years before—"however we toil or wheresoever we wander, our fatigued wishes still recur to home for tranquillity: we long to die in that spot which gave us birth, and in that pleasing expectation we find an opiate for every calamity."<sup>1</sup> No doubt

Remembrance woke with all its busy train,  
Swell'd at his heart, and turned the past to pain,

and imagination glorified and consecrated what memory recalled. We need not suspect the intervention of any

<sup>1</sup> *Citizen of the World*, ciii.

English village as Forster and others do. Lissoy and Lissoy only was in his mind, but it was the Lissoy of his youth and of his dreams.

It may be doubted whether Nature in the abstract had much attraction for Goldsmith, whether its mere phenomena in themselves had power to charm him. In his novel and in his *History of Animated Nature* there are many delightful touches of description, but with him Nature is always associated with man and with animal life.

The first published poem by Collins, the *Persian Eclogues*, gave no promise of the poems on which his fame rests and which stand absolutely alone in the poetry of the eighteenth century, anticipating all that is most exquisite in the lyric of Coleridge and in the lyric of Tennyson. A critic who should be confronted with such a passage as this :—

With eyes uprais'd, as one inspired,  
Pale Melancholy sat retired ;  
And from her wild sequestered seat,  
In notes by distance made more sweet,  
Poured through the mellow horn her pensive soul :  
And dashing soft from rocks around,  
Bubbling runnels join'd the sound ;  
Through glades and glooms the mingled measure stole :  
Or o'er some haunted spring, with fond delay,  
Round an holy calm diffusing,  
Love of peace and lonely musing,  
In hollow murmurs died away—

might well be forgiven for pronouncing that such a passage was an impossibility in the poetry of the middle



eighteenth century. Yet so it was: till Tennyson appeared no such magical note had been sounded in descriptive poetry. Collins was born at Chichester in December 1721. In 1742, just after he left Oxford, he published the *Persian Eclogues*, and in December 1746 the golden volume of his *Odes*. It is in the *Ode to Evening* and the *Ode on the Death of Thomson* that he appears as the poet of Nature. Can they be localised? Whoever is acquainted with the neighbourhood of Chichester, and has wandered along the roads through the fields there when the shades of evening are falling, will have no difficulty in understanding what suggested and what inspired this incomparable sketch:—

O nymph reserved, while now the bright-haired sun  
Sits in yon Western tent, whose cloudy skirts,  
With brede ethereal wove,  
O'erhang his wavy bed :

Now air is hush'd, save where the weak-eyed bat,  
With short shrill shriek, flits by on leathern wing,  
Or where the beetle winds  
His small but sullen horn,

As oft he rises 'midst the twilight path,  
Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum.

It ought not to be forgotten that Collins revised this *Ode*, and in this revision, for the stanza which ran in the first edition and which is commonly printed now:—

Then let me rove some wild and heathy scene,  
Or find some ruin 'midst its dreary dells,  
Whose walls more awful nod  
By thy religious gleams.







was substituted :—

Then lead, calm votaress, where some sheety lake  
Cheers the lone heath, or some time-hallow'd pile,  
Or upland fallows grey  
Reflect its last cool gleam.

In the next stanzas he blends what is characteristic of Chichester scenery with such a prospect as we might have from Ben Lomond or Snowdon :—

But when chill blustering winds, or driving rain,  
Prevent my willing feet, be mine the hut  
That from the mountain's side  
Views wilds and swelling floods,

And hamlets brown, and dim-discover'd spires,  
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all  
Thy dewy fingers draw  
The gradual dusky veil.

In the *Ode on the Death of Thomson* he conducts to the scene which Thomson himself had so vividly described—the scene of the Thames and the meadows from Richmond Hill :—

Remembrance oft shall haunt the shore,  
When Thames in summer wreaths is drest ;  
And oft suspend the dashing oar,  
To bid his gentle spirit rest !

And oft as ease and health retire  
To breezy lawn, or forest deep,  
The friend shall view yon whitening spire,  
And 'mid the varied landscape weep.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richmond Church.

But thou, lorn stream, whose sullen tide  
 No sedge-crown'd Sisters now attend,  
 Now waft me from the green hill's side  
 Whose cold turf hides the buried friend !

And see, the fairy valleys fade,  
 Dun night has veiled the solemn view !  
 Yet once again, dear parted Shade,  
 Meek Nature's Child, again adieu !

The genial meads, assign'd to bless  
 Thy life, shall mourn thy early doom !  
 Their herds and shepherd girls shall dress  
 With simple hands thy rural tomb.

Long, long thy stone and pointed clay  
 Shall melt the musing Briton's eyes :  
 O vales and wild woods, shall he say,  
 In yonder grave your Druid lies !

Whether Collins ever visited the Highlands of Scotland does not appear, but there are fine touches of description, the truthfulness of which has often been commented on, in his *Ode on the Superstitions in the Scottish Highlands*. It is said that he designed to write a series of scenes from Nature, after the manner of the *Ode to Evening*, but that the miserable indifference of his contemporaries to his Odes—which, in consequence, he indignantly bought up and destroyed so far as he could procure them—prevented this and other projects. Criticism abounds in curiosities, and strange indeed have been the mismeasurements which contemporary men of genius have made of each other, but that Gray should not have seen the extraordinary merit of Collins' lyrics is inexplicable. Yet so it was. "Have you

seen," he writes to his friend Wharton, "the work of two young authors, a Mr. Warton and a Mr. Collins, both writers of Odes?"—he is referring to Joseph Warton's Odes, which came out at the same time as Collins's—"It is odd enough, but each is the half of a considerable man, and one the counterpart of the other. The first has but little invention, very poetical choice of expression, and a good ear; the second a fine fancy modelled upon the antique, a bad ear, great variety of words and images, and no choice at all. They both deserve to last some years, but will not."

What Weston was to Cowper, Stoke Pogis was to Gray. A visit to the churchyard and its immediate neighbourhood is even now the best of all commentaries on the *Ode on the Spring*, *Ode on the Distant Prospect of Eton*, on *The Long Story*, and on the *Elegy*. His mother's life had been a very unhappy one, and leaving her husband she had joined her sister Mary Antrobus in setting up a kind of India warehouse in Cornhill. The business prospered, her husband died, and the two sisters, in October 1742, went to live with a widowed sister, a Mrs. Rogers, at Stoke Pogis, in Buckingham, which is about three miles from Slough. The house in which they lived was called West End House, and was situated in the northern end of the parish, and is within a mile or so of Burnham Beeches. It was a farmhouse, two storeys high, with a rustic porch over the door, and it stood in a hollow screened by trees. A small stream ran through the garden, and on one



side of the cottage extended an upland field, at the summit of which was an artificial mound with a summer-house upon it giving a full prospect of Eton and Windsor. All, unhappily, is changed now: the cottage has disappeared, with it the garden, and a modern Elizabethan mansion with proportionately extensive grounds has taken its place. But it is with the church and the scenery round it that Gray is more particularly associated; this, happily, is very little changed. The church, which is dedicated to St. Giles, is a small Gothic structure, situated on the edge of a slight ridge which continues eastward and westward on either side, and slopes gradually southward towards the Thames. A few years ago the church had a wooden spire prettily overgrown, as Gray described it, with ivy; but this is now gone. Trees, chiefly elms and Scotch firs, tower up on each side of the churchyard, and opposite the porch are two very old yew trees, in the shade of which the turf still "heaves" with nameless graves. We have only to take away the wall dividing the churchyard from Stoke Park, and this in Gray's time did not exist, to restore the landscape as it met his eyes. From the churchyard to West End there was a path still open to pedestrians across the meadows on by the lane leading to Stoke Common. But the neighbourhood was familiar to Gray some years before his mother settled there, for he used to stay, while still a schoolboy at Eton and an undergraduate at Cambridge, with his uncle at Britwell,



near Burnham. Thus we find him writing to Walpole in 1737 :—

My comfort amid all this is that I have, at the distance of half a mile through a green lane, a forest—the vulgar call it a common—all my own, at least as good as so, for I spy no human being in it but myself. It is a little chaos of mountains and precipices ; mountains, it is true, that do not ascend much above the clouds, nor are the declivities quite as amazing as Dover Cliff, but just such hills as people who love their necks as well as I do may venture to climb, and crags that give the eye as much pleasure as if they were more dangerous. Both vale and hill are covered with most venerable beeches and other very reverend vegetables, that, like most other people, are always dreaming over their old stories to the winds.

And as they bow their hoary tops relate,  
In murm'ring sounds, the dark decrees of Fate ;  
While visions, as poetic eyes avow,  
Cling to each leaf, and swarm on every bough.

At the foot of one of these squats me, I, *il penseroso*, and there grow to the trunk for a whole morning. The timorous hare and sportive squirrel gambol around me like Adam in Paradise, before he had his Eve ; but I think he did not use to read Virgil, as I commonly do here.

After his mother settled at West End House, Gray spent all his vacations with her, regularly coming from Cambridge. It was here he studied and meditated. The feud with Walpole and the death of his beloved friend, Richard West, initiated him in life's saddening experiences ; then came the death of his aunt, Mary Antrobus in 1749, which is said to have induced him to finish the *Elegy*, begun some years before. It is

interesting to note how the inspiration of all his early poems came from what met his eyes or was suggested by what occupied his mind at Stoke. His earliest extant poem is the *Ode on Spring*. Its scenery is photographed from the garden at West End and in Stoke Park :—

Where'er the oak's thick branches stretch  
 A broader browner shade ;  
 Where'er the rude and moss-grown beech  
 O'ercanopies the glade ;  
 Beside some water's rushy brink  
 With me the Muse shall sit—

and there is not a touch in the poem which might not have been suggested by what surrounded him. Can we doubt that his first printed poem, the *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton*, occurred to him as he meditated with that prospect actually before him in the little summer-house—still discernible both from Skinner's Pond Field and the Pond Field ?

Ye distant spires, ye antique towers,  
 That crown the watery glade.

And ye, that from the stately brow  
 Of Windsor's heights th' expanse below  
 Of grove, of lawn, of mead survey ;  
 Whose turf, whose shade, whose flowers among  
 Wanders the hoary Thames along  
 His silver-winding way !

The scenery of the *Elegy* was a literal transcript to the minutest detail of what he could see any evening as he stood in the churchyard, and the magical power





with which the very soul of the scene passed in quint-essence into the poem may still be felt by any one who will, as evening falls, visit the spot. Here may still be heard "the drowsy tinklings" "lulling" "the distant folds"; may be seen

The yew-tree's shade,  
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,

The nodding beech  
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high.

Nor have we to go far either for "the upland lawn," "the green-wood side" of the rejected stanza or for the "babbling brook." It has been suggested that the churchyard of the village of Upton, which is about a mile to the north-east of Windsor, was the scene of the *Elegy*, on the ground that elm trees abound there, whereas Scotch firs predominate at Stoke Pogis. To this it may be answered that the Scotch firs have sprung up since Gray's time, and that as elms abound in the park, they probably preceded the firs.

Near the south-east window of Stoke Church, on a plain brick altar tomb, may be read an inscription from Gray's pen:—

In the vault beneath are deposited, in hope of a joyful resurrection, the remains of Mary Antrobus. She died unmarried, Nov. 5, 1749, aged sixty-six. In the same pious confidence, beside her friend and sister, here sleep the remains of Dorothy Gray, widow; the tender, careful mother of many children, one of whom alone had the misfortune to survive her. She died March 11, 1753, aged sixty-seven.

Of Gray himself, though he rests in the same tomb,



no word is said. But these are not the only associations with Gray at Stoke Pogis. As we stand on the south side of the churchyard, just at the entrance, we see through the trees of the Park, on the right, two chimneys. If we make our way to them, which we can do by a pathway running parallel with the church wall, we see that they belong to a venerable, ivy-draped building. This is one wing, all that remains of the old Stoke Manor, once a fine Gothic mansion with high gables, projecting windows, built in 1555 by the Earl of Huntingdon, and occupied successively, so tradition says, by Sir Christopher Hatton, though this is doubtful, and by Sir Edward Coke, who, in 1601, entertained Queen Elizabeth there. In Gray's time it was the residence of the Viscountess Cobham. In 1789, when the present Stoke Park was built, all but the wing preserved was demolished. It is interesting to know that for some time it was fitted up as a studio for Sir Edwin Landseer, and it was when at work here in 1852 that he suddenly became deranged. A call made on Gray by two relatives of Lady Cobham's, Miss Speed and Lady Schaub, who were staying with her, was the occasion of his poem, *The Long Story*.

In a recent visit to Stoke Pogis, I was sorry to see that the hand of "improvement" had been busy, and that both the church and churchyard are becoming most disgustingly trim and modern. Surely every alteration is a mistake. In a place with such associations, conservatism can scarcely be carried too far.







## FALCONER AND MARINE SCENERY, MASON, THE WARTONS, AND BEATTIE

WITH very little education, uncultivated taste, and with Pope's *Homer* for his model of style and verse, Falconer essayed to record his experiences as a sailor, and has produced a poem which stands absolutely alone in our poetry. The contrast between the truth and vividness of his descriptions and his vicious diction, with its cheap pomp and stilted artificiality, is sometimes startling even to ludicrousness. And yet the merits of his poem are really great: it is excellently constructed—an epic, with the conflict between man's skill and courage and the power of the terrible element in collision with it for its theme. In the first canto man musters his forces, and the crew and the ship are described; in the second, man is confronted with his adversary, and the sea and a ship's ordinary experiences on it are detailed; in the third, off Cape Colonna, battle is joined, and man has lost. All Falconer's descriptions are drawn from experience; they have, like Crabbe's, the merit of truth. He was himself the second mate of

a vessel employed in the Levant trade, and was shipwrecked in a passage from Alexandria to Venice, three only of the crew being saved. By a tragical irony the poet of the shipwreck perished by shipwreck. He sailed from England on the *Aurora* in September 1769. After they left the Cape nothing more was heard of her, not a vestige being found; it is supposed that she went down in the Mozambique Channel.

In selecting two or three of Falconer's descriptions, I will not mark the omissions by asterisks. Let us take first the rising and effects of a sudden squall: -

But see! in confluence borne before the blast,  
 Clouds roll'd on cloud, the dusky moon o'er-cast:  
 The blackening ocean curls, the winds arise,  
 And the dark scud in swift succession flies.  
 Four hours the Sun his high meridian throne  
 Had left, and o'er Atlantic regions shone;  
 Still blacker clouds, that all the skies invade,  
 Draw o'er his sullied orb a dismal shade:  
 A lowering squall obscures the southern sky,  
 Before whose sweeping breath the waters fly.  
 It comes resistless! and with foamy sweep  
 Upturns the whitening surface of the deep:  
 The clouds, with ruin pregnant, now impend,  
 And storm and cataracts tumultuous blend.  
 Deep, on her side, the reeling vessel lies:  
*Brail up the mizen quick!* the master cries,  
*Man the clue-garnets! Let the main-sheet fly!*  
 It rends in thousand shivering shreds on high!  
 The main-sail, all in streaming ruins tore,  
 Loud flutt'ring, imitates the thunder's roar.

Canto II.

The following are from the last scene :—

High o'er the poop th' audacious seas aspire,  
Uproll'd in hills of fluctuating fire ;  
With lab'ring throes she rolls on either side,  
And dips her gunnels in the yawning tide.  
The gale howls doleful through the blocks and shrouds,  
And big rain pours a deluge from the clouds.

In vain the cords and axes were prepar'd,  
For every wave now smites the quivering yard ;  
High o'er the ship they throw a dreadful shade,  
Then on her burst in terrible cascade ;  
Across the founder'd deck o'erwhelming roar,  
And foaming, swelling, bound upon the shore.  
Swift up the mounting billow now she flies,  
Her shatter'd top half-buried in the skies.

Canto III.

Take, too, the picture of a shoal of dolphin :—

But now, beneath the lofty vessel's stern,  
A shoal of sportive dolphins they discern  
Beaming from burnish'd scales refulgent rays,  
Till all the glowing ocean seems to blaze :  
In curling wreaths they wanton on the tide,  
Now bound aloft, now downward swiftly glide ;  
Awhile beneath the waves their tracks remain,  
And burn in silver streams along the liquid plain.

Canto II.

Not without beauty, if of a somewhat commonplace order, is another of his marine scenes :—

The sun's bright orb, declining all serene,  
Now glanc'd obliquely o'er the woodland scene :  
The glassy ocean hush'd forgets to roar,  
But trembling murmurs on the sandy shore :

And lo! his surface lovely to behold  
 Glows in the west, a sea of living gold!  
 While, all above, a thousand liveries gay  
 The skies with pomp ineffable array.

Canto I.

William Mason is now chiefly, perhaps only, remembered as the friend and biographer of Gray. But in the history of descriptive poetry he holds a conspicuous place, for his *English Garden*, an elaborate poem in four books, places us in the midst of the controversy between the votaries of Art and the votaries of Nature in the science of landscape-gardening, represented on the one hand by William Kemp, Lancelot Brown and their school, and on the other by the Chinese vagaries of Sir William Chambers and his followers. The controversy had arisen early in the century. Pope had led the reaction against the Dutch style and the formality of Le Notre, and had ridiculed the gardens where

No pleasing intricacies intervene,  
 No artful wildness to perplex the scene;

and where

Grove nods at grove, each alley has a brother,  
 And half the platform just reflects the other.

Brown and Kemp, with their disciples, had revolutionised all this, substituting not Art for Nature, but calling Art to the assistance of Nature. The principles on which they proceeded are, at least from a technical point of view, described so well by Mason that the passage may be transcribed:—



Of Nature's various scenes the painter culls  
That for his fav'rite theme, where the fair whole  
Is broken into ample parts, and bold ;  
Where to the eye three well-mark'd distances  
Spread their peculiar colouring—vivid green,  
Warm brown, and black opaque the foreground bears  
Conspicuous ; sober olive coldly marks  
The second distance ; thence the third declines  
In softer blue, or, less'ning still, is lost  
In faintest purple. When thy taste is call'd  
To adorn a scene where Nature's self presents  
All these distinct gradations, then rejoice,  
As does the painter, and, like him, apply  
Thy colours : plant thou on each separate part  
Its proper foliage. Chief, for there thy skill  
Has its chief scope, enrich with all the hues  
That flowers, that shrubs, that trees can yield, the sides  
Of that fair path from whence our sight is led  
Gradual to view the whole. Where'er thou wind'st  
That path, take heed between the scene and eye  
To vary and to mix thy chosen greens.  
Here for a while with cedar and with larch,  
That from the ground spread their close foliage, hide  
The view entire. Then o'er some lowly tuft  
Where rose and woodbine bloom, permit its charms  
To burst upon the sight : now through a copse  
Of beech, that rear their smooth and stately trunks,  
Admit it partially, and half exclude  
And half reveal its graces : in this path  
How long soe'er the wanderer roves, each step  
Shall wake fresh beauties ; each short point present  
A different picture, new, and yet the same.

Book I.

The whole long poem is a detailed picture of an ideal paradise constructed on Brown's principles, pompous and monotonous in style and in versification, even intolerably so, but producing with curious fidelity

something of the same effect on the imagination as his laboured artifices for the "improvement" of Nature produce on the eye. With what provoked Mason to write the poem, which appeared at intervals between 1772 and 1782, and the satire *An Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers*, which appeared just after the publication of the first Book, we can sympathise. Chambers, in a Dissertation published in 1772, had observed that "Nature affords us but few materials to work with. Plants, grounds, and water are her only productions; and though both the forms and arrangements of these may be varied to an incredible degree, yet they have but few striking varieties, the rest being of the nature of changes rung upon bells, which, though in reality different, still produce the same uniform kind of jingling, the variation being too minute to be easily perceived." Art, consequently, must supply the scantiness of Nature. And this scantiness he proposed to supply by introducing the barbarous fantasticalities of the Chinese style.

Mason is a voluminous and accomplished poet, but stilted and conventional, and, though he invoked simplicity, was pompously artificial. That Gray, who was his friend, should have overrated him is natural, but that he should have pronounced two lines in one of his friend's odes :—

While through the West, where sinks the crimson day, .  
Meek Twilight slowly sails, and waves her banners grey—

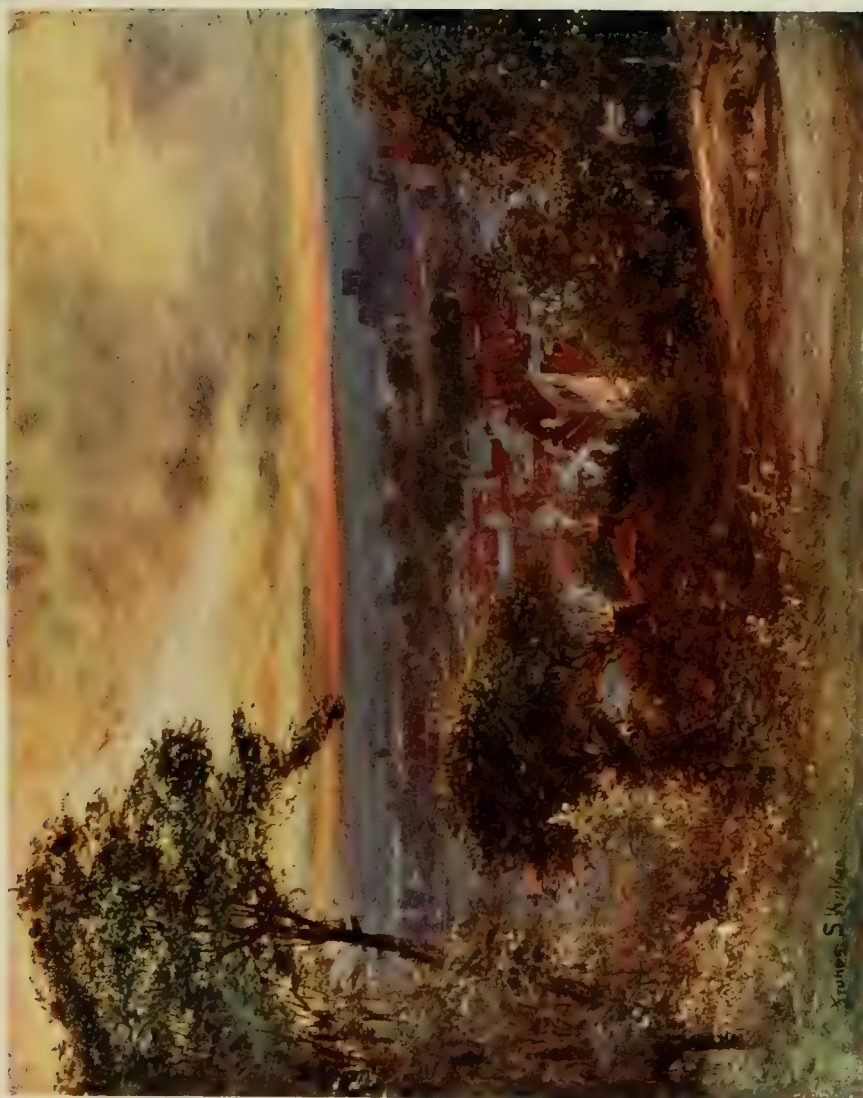
superb, is not easily explained.

Few men contributed more to the Romantic Revival than the brothers Joseph and Thomas Warton. Joseph was born in 1722, received his early education at Winchester, where Collins was one of his schoolfellows, matriculated from Oriel College, Oxford, and, taking his degree in 1744, was not long afterwards ordained. In 1766 he became headmaster of Winchester School, over which he presided with much celebrity till 1793, when he retired to his living at Wickham, where he died in 1800. His *Essay on Pope*, the first volume of which appeared in 1757, may be said to mark the reaction against the Augustan School of English poetry, its object being to vindicate the superiority of our older poets to those of the Classical School, and to that reaction, passing as the work did through several editions, it undoubtedly contributed. What he inculcated in his writings he enforced as a schoolmaster, and among his pupils was Bowles, whose Sonnets were many years later so powerfully to affect Coleridge. As a poet—and his earliest poem, *The Enthusiast, or the Lover of Nature*, is dated 1740—he also contributed to the same movement. *The Enthusiast* is an imitation of Thomson, and one of the most pleasing of his Nature-poems. The *Ode to Fancy* is more or less an imitation of Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. His *Ode to Content* furnished Collins with the model for the *Ode to Evening*. The most pleasing passage in his poems is perhaps the following from the *Ode to Fancy*:—

O lover of the desert, hail !  
Say in what deep and pathless vale,  
Or on what hoary mountain's side,  
'Midst falls of water, you reside ;  
'Mid broken rocks a rugged scene,  
With green and grassy dales between ;  
'Mid forests dark of aged oak,  
Ne'er echoing with the woodman's stroke,  
Where Nature seemed to sit alone,  
Majestic on a craggy throne.

This, though commonplace, is at least pretty.

Much more celebrated and influential was his brother Thomas, born six years later. The greater part of his life was spent at Oxford—as commoner, scholar, and Fellow of Trinity College—for he matriculated from that college in his seventeenth year, and, after residing there for seven-and-forty years, received his death-summons, a stroke of paralysis, in the Common Room, dying the next day. He held several distinguished posts. Between 1757 and 1767 he was Professor of Poetry ; in 1785 Camden Professor of History ; and in the same year succeeded Cibber as Poet Laureate. His *History of English Poetry* is still a classical work. His edition of Theocritus and his Latin poems, and his edition of Milton's Minor Poems, are also proofs of his accomplishments as a scholar and a critic. Like Gray, with whose career his own was singularly analogous, he was also a humorist ; and like Gray a poet, but of a very inferior order. The interest of Warton is, like that of his brother, almost entirely historical, but in that respect he is really important,









for he contributed much to the Romantic movement. In his *Crusade*, and more particularly in his *Grave of King Arthur*, he anticipated Sir Walter Scott, the last poem being almost indistinguishable from Scott's best narrative. His Sonnets anticipate Bowles, and that on the River Lodon Wordsworth. The poem of *The Suicide*, a most powerful poem, had the end sustained the beginning, has quite the modern note, particularly in the suffusion of the scenery with sentiment. But his descriptive poetry, best illustrated in *The Hamlet*, written in Wychwood Forest, in the *Poem sent to a Friend on his leaving a Favourite Village in Hampshire*, and the *Approach of Summer*, though very pleasing, just stop short of distinction, and are imitative. He has never the touch of magic, never the touch which redeems from commonplace.

There is, however, something of Gainsborough in the following from the lines written in Wychwood Forest. He is speaking of the rustics round :—

When morning's twilight-tinctur'd beam  
Strikes their low thatch with slanting gleam,  
They rove abroad in ether blue,  
To dip the scythe in fragrant dew ;  
The sheaf to bind, the beech to fell,  
That nodding shades a craggy dell.  
'Midst gloomy glades, in warbles clear,  
Wild Nature's sweetest notes they hear :  
On green untrodden banks they view  
The hyacinth's neglected hue :  
In their lone haunts, and woodland rounds,  
They spy the squirrel's airy bounds ;

And startle from her ashen spray,  
 Across the glen the screaming jay ;  
 Each native charm their steps explore  
 Of Solitude's sequester'd store.

Their little sons, who spread the bloom  
 Of health around the clay-built room,  
 Or through the primrose coppice stray,  
 Or gambol in the new-mown hay ;  
 Or quaintly braid the cowslip twine,  
 Or drive afield the tardy kine ;  
 Or hasten from the sultry hill,  
 To loiter at the shady rill ;  
 Or climb the tall pine's gloomy crest,  
 To rob the raven's ancient nest.

One would have been glad to find in Warton what Oxford had to wait for more than a century to find, a worthy laureate of her beauties ; but the utmost that poor Warton could do for her is seen in the following lines from his *Isis* :—

Ye fretted pinnacles, ye fanes sublime,  
 Ye towers that wear the mossy vest of time ;  
 Ye massy piles of old munificence,  
 At once the pride of learning and defence ;  
 Ye cloisters pale, that, lengthening to the sight,  
 To contemplation, step by step, invite ;  
 Ye high-arch'd walks, where oft the whisper clear  
 Of harps unseen have swept the poet's ear ;  
 Ye temples dim, where pious duty pays  
 Her holy hymns of ever-echoing praise ;  
 Lo ! your loved Isis, from the bordering vale,  
 With all a mother's fondness bids you hail !

Most of Warton's ambitious poems, with their archaisms, quaintness, and centos from the old poets,

too often justify, it must be owned, Johnson's well-known sarcastic epigram upon them :—

Where'er I turn my view,  
All is strange yet nothing new :  
Endless labour all along,  
Endless labour to be wrong,  
Phrase that Time hath flung away,  
Uncouth words in disarray,  
Tricked in antique ruff and bonnet  
Ode and elegy and sonnet.

Still more historical importance than belongs to the poetry of the Wartons must be assigned to Beattie's *Minstrel*, the extraordinary popularity of which during the latter part of the eighteenth century shows how much the public taste had reacted in favour of a return to Nature. Beattie's poem was suggested, as he himself says, by that epoch-making work, Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. Its purpose was to trace the progress of a poet moulded by communion with Nature. The poet is a Scotch shepherd, his surroundings the scenery characteristic of those parts of Scotland afterwards celebrated by Scott. But Beattie never describes in detail, his pictures are general. He has true enthusiasm for Nature. There is no mistaking the accent of such a stanza as this :—

O how canst thou renounce the boundless store  
Of charms which Nature to her votary yields !  
The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,  
The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields ;

All that the genial ray of morning gilds,  
 And all that echoes to the song of even,  
 All that the mountain's sheltering bosom shields,  
 And all the dread magnificence of heaven,  
 O how canst thou renounce, and hope to be forgiven !

His tone and touch are often, it is true, conventional, but occasionally he has real charm, as in :—

When o'er the sky advanced the kindling dawn,  
 The crimson cloud, blue main, and mountain grey,  
 And lake, dim-gleaming on the smoky lawn.

The following, too, is both picturesque and powerful :—

Oft when the winter storm had ceased to rave,  
 He roamed the snowy waste at even, to view  
 The cloud stupendous, from th' Atlantic wave  
 High-towering, sail along th' horizon blue ;  
 Where, 'midst the changeful scenery, ever new,  
 Fancy a thousand wondrous forms describes,  
 More wildly great than ever pencil drew ;  
 Rocks, torrents, gulfs, and shapes of giant size,  
 And glitt'ring cliffs on cliffs, and fiery ramparts rise.

Beattie anticipates, if very faintly, Byron on one side and Wordsworth on the other. It would be scarcely too much to say that the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* are not only more or less modelled on *The Minstrel*, Harold being Edwin Byronised, but it recalls it in many details, the most striking, perhaps, being the concluding stanzas of the second canto, which, though founded on fact, have a very striking resemblance to those concluding the second canto of Beattie's poem. In Beattie's

“lone enthusiast” we have more than the adumbration of Wordsworth’s ideal poet, that poet in whose education Nature is the central informing power, who in her finds inspiration and wisdom, and who in her light reads man and life. He is fully entitled to the praise of an initiator, and this is his highest praise. Regarded independently and in relation to its purely intrinsic merit, his poetry is scarcely likely to find readers now. He is one of those minor lights which, like so many others, have disappeared in the effulgence of the luminaries who succeeded them.

LANGHORNE, JAGO, SCOTT OF AMWELL,  
CHARLOTTE SMITH, BOWLES, CROWE,  
AND HURDIS

AMONG the most pleasing of the minor Nature poets of the latter half of the eighteenth century was Dr. John Langhorne, who is now, perhaps, better known popularly as co-translator with his brother of *Plutarch's Lives*. He belonged to, if indeed he was not the founder of, what may be called the Sentimental School. He struck many of the notes which were afterwards sounded more powerfully by Wordsworth. His most elaborate purely descriptive poem is *Studley Park*, and he was also the laureate of the River Eden and the Valley of Irwan. The first in heroic couplets is in the conventional style; six lines are, perhaps, worth quoting :—

Fancy bends her eye,  
Longs o'er the cliffs and deep'ning lawns to fly.  
Enchanted sees each silv'ry-floating wave  
Beat thy green banks, thy lonely vallies lave :  
And now delighted, now she joys to hear  
Thy deep, slow falls, long-lab'ring through her ear.

But it is in his insistence that in Nature and in



Nature only that man's moral salvation lies that he is chiefly interesting. Thus in a poem entitled an *Inscription on the Door of a Study* he writes :—

Has fair Philosophy thy love ?  
 Away ! she lives in yonder grove.  
 If the sweet Muse thy pleasure gives ;—  
 With her in yonder grove she lives :  
 And if Religion claims thy care ;  
 Religion, fled from books, is there  
 For first from Nature's works we drew  
 Our knowledge, and our virtue too.

In his *Fables of Flora* he anticipates Wordsworth by enlisting Nature in the service of moral teaching, and when Wordsworth wrote

One impulse from a vernal wood  
 May teach you more of man,  
 Of moral evil and of good,  
 Than all the sages can,

he simply repeated what Langhorne had preached nearly forty years before him. Thus in his tenth fable Langhorne writes, in reference to Nature's phenomena :—

Whatever charms the ear or eye,  
 All beauty and all harmony ;  
 If sweet sensations these produce,  
 I know they have their moral use ;  
 I know that Nature's charms can move  
 The springs that strike to virtue's love.

Nor is this all. Like Wordsworth, he insists, and it is the main burden of his poems, that the true ends

of life are peace and joy, which can be found in Nature alone, for in Nature God reveals Himself and speaks.

Langhorne was a weak man and not master of himself, but he had real genius, and sometimes surprises us with his flashes of unexpected power. As when, speaking of a ruin, he says,

Where longs to fall that rifted spire,  
As weary of th' insulting air,

which is surely a fine imaginative touch.

Genius most certainly cannot be claimed for Richard Jago. A schoolfellow and friend of Shenstone, he became a servitor of University College, Oxford, in which University he took his Master's degree in 1738. He subsequently took orders and became vicar of Snitterfield in Warwickshire, where in 1767 he produced his only poem of any importance, *Edge Hill*. On a work so essentially mediocre it would be absurd to enlarge, but in any account of descriptive poetry it must find a place, for it is the most elaborate local poem in our language.

The poet takes his stand on Edge Hill, and the view from the eminence, however tamely described, is at least accurate and not without vividness :—

The summit's gain'd! and, from its airy height,  
The late-trod plain looks like an inland sea,  
View'd from some promontory's hoary head,  
With distant shores environ'd; nor with face

Glassy and uniform, but when its waves  
Are gently ruffled by the southern gale,  
And the tall masts like waving forests rise.

Such is the scene! that, from the terrac'd hill,  
Displays its graces; intermixture sweet  
Of lawns and groves, of open and retir'd.  
Vales, farms, towns, villas, castles, distant spires,  
And hills on hills, with ambient clouds enrob'd,  
In long succession court the lab'ring sight,  
Lost in the bright confusion.

He then in the course of his four Books surveys in detail all that can be discerned, first from the south-west of the hill, which occupies the morning; then from Ratley Hill in the centre, which occupies the noon and afternoon; then from the north-east, which occupies the evening; intermingling his descriptions with legendary, historical, and antiquarian particulars. Warwick is surveyed; Coventry, in connection with which the story of Godiva is told, not exactly in the style of Tennyson; Kenilworth, with its ancient glories,

Vanished like the fleeting forms  
Drawn in an evening cloud;

Solihull, Birmingham, the Dasset Hills, Farnborough, Wormleighton, Shuckburgh, Leame, and other places, the poem concluding with an account of the great event of which the hill was the scene, with appropriate reflections. Jago, probably with a view to preferment, is careful to introduce flattering descriptions of all the great houses and seats of important people which come within his survey. The poem is really interesting, and

with the scene before us it is impossible not to admire the ingenuity and scrupulous thoroughness with which the author—we wish we could call him the poet—has performed his task.

What Jago aspired to do for Warwickshire, John Scott aspired to do for a more limited sphere. Scott, whose name will be familiar to readers of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, was a Quaker, the son of a maltster who had settled, in 1740, at Amwell in Hertfordshire, a favourite haunt, it will be remembered, of old Isaac Walton, the scene of his Anglers' Dialogue being the neighbouring vale of Lee, between Tottenham and Ware. In Scott's time—his poem appeared in 1776—Amwell was one of the prettiest hamlets in England, and the surrounding country, particularly the road leading from Langley-bottom to Widbury Hill, truly lovely and picturesque. Not much can be said for the poetical quality of Scott's poem, which is not infrequently at once pompous and prosaic, but it is vividly realistic. Thus of Langley-bottom he writes in verse which, anticipating, would not have disgraced Cowper:—

Elysian scene !

At ev'ning often, while the setting sun  
On the green summit of thy Eastern groves  
Pour'd full his yellow radiance ; while the voice  
Of Zephyr whispering 'midst the rustling leaves,  
The sound of water murmuring through the sedge,  
The turtle's plaintive call, and music soft  
Of distant bells, whose ever varying notes  
In slow sad measure mov'd.

And here is his picture of the scene from Amwell, as we view it from below the neighbourhood of the church. We smile at his prosaic "how picturesque," but we must remember that the word when he wrote had not the *banale* association it has now, but was new to our language.

How picturesque the view ! where up the side  
 Of that steep bank, her roofs of russet thatch  
 Rise mix'd with trees, above whose swelling tops  
 Ascends the tall church tow'r, and loftier still  
 The hill's extended ridge. How picturesque !  
 Where slow beneath that bank the silver stream  
 Glides by the flowering isle, and willow groves  
 Wave on its northern verge. . . . How picturesque  
 The slender group of airy elm, the clump  
 Of pollard oak, or ash, with ivy brown  
 Entwin'd ; the walnut's gloomy breadth of boughs,  
 The orchard's ancient fence of rugged pales,  
 The haystack's dusky cone, the moss-grown shed,  
 The clay-built barn ; the elder-shaded cot,  
 Whose white-wash'd gable prominent through green  
 Of waving branches, shows . . .  
 . . . The wall with mantling vines  
 O'erspread, the porch with climbing woodbine wreath'd,  
 And under sheltering eaves the sunny bench  
 Where brown hives range.

This is an excellent illustration of the Nature-painting characteristic of the eighteenth century, when this poetry became elaborated : not a touch of imagination, not a touch of fancy, and without any appeal to either ; body without soul, accident without essence.

Nor was *Amwell* the only contribution of Scott to descriptive poetry. In the preface to his *Amæbian*



*Eclogues* he observed that "much of the rural imagery which our country affords has already been introduced in poetry, but many obvious and pleasing appearances seem to have totally escaped notice." This he aspired to supply, and he supplied it by minutely discriminated descriptions of flowers, herbs, trees, and the common objects of the country, managed principally by epithets, thus anticipating Crabbe, though he has nothing of Crabbe's felicity. His descriptions are rendered ludicrous by the form he employs—amœbæan delineations of natural objects being surely more ridiculous than burlesque.

Far superior to Scott and Jago was Charlotte Smith, whose *Elegiac Sonnets and Other Poems* ran through many editions, and had indeed extraordinary popularity between 1784 and 1797. They were highly praised by Miss Mitford, a very competent judge, who told Mrs. Browning that she never took a spring walk without feeling Charlotte Smith's love of Nature and power of describing it, and who observed in one of her letters that this poetess had, "with all her faults, the eye and the mind of a landscape poet." At such praise a modern reader would smile, for it may be doubted whether any more favourable illustrations of Mrs. Smith's merits could be found than the following :—

Again the wood and long-withdrawing vale  
 In many a tint of tender green are drest,  
 Where the young leaves, unfolding, scarce conceal  
 Beneath their early shade, the half-form'd nest



Of finch and woodlark ; and the primrose pale,  
And lavish cowslip, wildly scatter'd round,  
Give their sweet spirits to the sighing gale.

Sonnet VIII.

Clouds, gold and purple, o'er the western ray  
Threw a bright veil, and catching lights between,  
Fell on the glancing sail, that we had seen  
With soft, but adverse winds, throughout the day  
Contending vainly.

Sonnet LXIX.

While Charlotte Smith was in the full tide of her modest popularity, a small volume of Sonnets, something in the style of her own, though in merit differing not merely in degree but in kind, stole into the world. This was entitled *Fourteen Sonnets written chiefly on Picturesque Spots during a Journey*, and it was published in Bath in 1789. The author of the volume was William Lisle Bowles, who had been a pupil of Joseph Warton at Winchester and of Thomas Warton at Trinity College, Oxford. These sonnets, whose influence on Coleridge is well known, as he has both in prose and verse expressed his indebtedness to them both in the way of stimulus and inspiration, may be said to mark an era in the development of the Romantic School. Bowles is undoubtedly as much a pupil of the Wartons in poetry as he was a scholar, but he had more simplicity, sensibility, refinement, and charm. The little volume became exceedingly popular, and to these Sonnets others were added in the same style.

Perhaps the most typical of those would be the first, and that I will transcribe :—

## AT TYNEMOUTH PRIORY

AFTER A TEMPESTUOUS VOYAGE

As slow I climb the cliff's ascending side,  
 Much musing on the track of terror past,  
 When o'er the dark wave rode the howling blast,  
 Pleased I look back, and view the tranquil tide  
 That laves the pebbled shore : and now the beam  
 Of evening smiles on the grey battlement,  
 And yon forsaken tower that time has rent :—  
 The lifted oar far off with transient gleam  
 Is touched, and hushed is all the billowy deep !  
 Soothed by the scene, thus on tired Nature's breast  
 A stillness slowly steals, and kindred rest ;  
 While sea-sounds lull her, as she sinks to sleep,  
 Like melodies that mourn upon the lyre,  
 Waked by the breeze, and, as they mourn, expire !

In a similar strain are the Sonnets on Bamburgh Castle, the River Wainsbeck, the River Itchin, the Tweed, Clydesdale, Dover Cliffs, the Cherwell, Netley Abbey, and Malvern ; little cameos penetrated with pensive sentiment. His more elaborate descriptive poems, such as *Banwell Hill*, were written many years later, and belong to the next century. On the whole, an important and distinguished place must be assigned to Bowles in the history of descriptive poetry. In his Sonnets culminated what had found successive expression in Langhorne, in the Wartons, and in Charlotte Smith, and thus he is the connecting-link between the descriptive poetry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In 1788 Jago had a disciple, but a disciple very

superior to his master, in William Crowe, who did for Lewesdon Hill what Jago had done for Edge Hill. Crowe was Public Orator at Oxford and rector of Alton Barnes in Wiltshire, which in 1787 he had exchanged for that of Stoke Allas in Dorsetshire, not far from the scene of his poem.

Lwesdon Hill is in the western part of Dorsetshire, and commands an extensive prospect over the neighbouring country. The poet represents himself as standing on the top of the hill on a May morning, his theme being the prospect before him :—

How changed is thy appearance, beauteous hill,  
Thou hast put off thy wintry garb, brown heath  
And russet fern, thy seemly-colour'd cloak,  
To hide the hoary frosts and dropping rains  
Of chill December, and art gaily robed  
In livery of the Spring : upon thy brow  
A cap of flowery hawthorn, and thy neck  
Mantled with new-sprung furze and spangles thick  
Of golden broom : nor lack thee tufted woods  
Adown thy sides : tall oaks of lusty green,  
The darker fir, light ash, and the fresh tops  
Of the young hazel join to form thy skirts  
In many a waving fold of verdant wreath.

From this proud eminence on all sides round  
Th' unbroken prospect opens to my view ;  
On all sides large, save only when the head  
Of Pillesdon rises, Pillesdon's lofty pen  
Which, like a rampire, bounds the vale beneath.  
There woods, there blooming orchards, there are seen  
Herds ranging, or at rest beneath the shade  
Of some wide-branching oak : there goodly fields  
Of corn and verdant pasture, whence the kine

Returning with their milky treasure home,  
Store the rich dairy.

See how the sun, here clouded, afar off  
Pours down the golden radiance of his light  
Upon the enridged sea, where the black ship  
Sails on the phosphor-seeming waves.

Such are favourable extracts from a poem which Wordsworth pronounced to be excellent, which Rogers said was full of noble passages, and which with *Paradise Lost* he studied as a model for his *Italy*. It is easy to see that Crowe had a more artistic eye and much better ear than Jago, but would any modern critic go further in praise of him?

Contemporary with Crowe was another Oxford dignitary who, in 1793, was Professor of Poetry in that University—James Hurdis. Hurdis, a somewhat voluminous poet, author of *The Village Curate*, *The Favourite Village*, and other poems, is a mild and colourless imitator of Cowper, holding pretty much the same place among descriptive poets as his friend Hayley holds among didactic.

This was the state of descriptive poetry of the average and popular order when the eighteenth century passed into the nineteenth.

## WILLIAM COWPER

### OLNEY AND WESTON

WITH the possible exception of Tennyson, no eminent English poet is so intimately associated with the scenes amidst which he lived as Cowper. The greater part, indeed almost the whole, of Cowper's descriptive poetry is little less than a series of photographs of what surrounded him at Olney and Weston. Nothing can be more delightful than to wander over these scenes with his poems in our hands, for they are a very mirror of what we see. Probably no places in England have so little changed since the middle of the eighteenth century, when the prince of landscape-gardeners, Lancelot Brown, commonly known by the nickname coined from a favourite phrase of his, "Capability Brown," was at the height of his vogue. With his handiwork we have, in dealing with Cowper's descriptive poetry, almost as much to do as with Nature's.

A short general account of Olney and Weston, and of the incidents in Cowper's life so intimately



connected with them, is a necessary preliminary to this sketch.

It will be remembered that, after his first attack of insanity in 1763, he went, on his recovery, in the summer of 1765, into lodgings at Huntingdon, that he might be near his brother John, who was a Fellow of Bennet College, Cambridge. At Huntingdon he made the acquaintance, through their son, of the Rev. Morley Unwin and his wife, with whom he became so intimate that he took up his residence with them. In the summer of 1767 Mr. Unwin was thrown from his horse, and killed. This, however, did not separate Cowper from the family, for between him and Mrs. Unwin, who was five or six years his senior, had sprung up the closest affection; he loving her "as a mother," she him "as a son." While still undecided where to settle, the Rev. John Newton, then curate of Olney, a very remarkable and interesting man, who was to become with Cowper co-author of the famous Olney Hymns, happened to call on them. He suggested that they should take a house near him, either at Olney or Emberton. His advice was taken, and on September 14, 1767, Cowper settled with the Unwins at a large house, or rather in the western portion of it, for they never occupied the whole, in the market-place at Olney, called Orchard Side, which became their home for nineteen years. The little town, which is about thirteen miles from Bedford, is the most northerly in Buckinghamshire. As we enter it from the railway







station, one long broad street widening southward into a spacious triangular market-place conducts in an almost straight line to the house now so famous. Fronting the market-place, a large, red-brick house with stone dressings, two doors and five windows, it is the most conspicuous object in its neighbourhood and instantly attracts the eye. It has, mainly owing to the efforts of Mr. Thomas Wright, the latest editor and biographer of Cowper, been most piously preserved, and is now a Museum rich in relics and mementos of the poet. Here we are in the very midst of all that is familiar to us in his poems and correspondence—the little parlour, a square room with two windows, referred to in the opening of the Fourth Book of *The Task*; the small casement at the back through which Puss, Tiny, and Bess came leaping out to their evening gambols on the Turkey carpet; his bedroom; the summer-house in the garden, at the back—"not much bigger than a sedan-chair"—now, it is true, separated by a wall from the poet's own garden, but absolutely intact, where he passed so many sad and so many happy hours. The door, too, which was made through the vicarage garden wall may be still traced in the brick-work; and the Guinea Field, though no longer an orchard, still retains its name. All that has quite disappeared is the greenhouse.

The town of Olney, as Cowper himself more than once ruefully observed, has in itself little beauty; but this is not the case with Weston, whither he removed

in November 1786, to occupy Weston Lodge, a large and comfortable house in the very middle of the village, where he lived till July 1795. Weston Underwood is only about a mile and a quarter from Olney; the only difference it made to him was that instead of having to walk that distance to view the scenes which he has so vividly described, he was in the midst of them. He has himself, in a letter to his friend, Mrs. Hill, described his situation here:—

The opposite object to the Lodge, and the only one, is an orchard, so well planted, and with trees of such growth, that we seem to look into a wood, or rather to be surrounded by one. Thus, placed as we are in the midst of a village, we have none of those disagreeables that belong to such a position, and the village itself is one of the prettiest I know: terminated at one end by the church tower, seen through the trees, and at the other by a very handsome gateway opening into a fine grove of elms belonging to our neighbour Courtenay.

The shrubbery at the back of the house, of which he so often speaks, and which he describes as being “very generally admired, being a delightful labyrinth, composed of flowering shrubs and adorned with gravel walks having convenient seats placed at appropriate distances,” has lately been converted into an orchard. It was here, while threading its winding walk, that he meditated, as he has himself told us, his projected poem on *The Four Ages*, a project unfortunately never carried out:—

Thus while grey evening lull'd the wind, and call'd  
Fresh odours from the shrubbery at my side,  
Taking my lonely winding walk, I mused.

At Weston he was within almost a stone's throw of the mansion of the family to whom the place owed so much—Weston Hall, the seat of the Throckmortons. Weston Hall stood on the right side of the road leading from Weston to Olney, just outside the village. It was demolished twenty-seven years after Cowper's death, in 1827, all that remains of it now being only the iron gates with four stone piers, and a portion of the stabling and granary topped by a cupola. But the park and grounds laid out under the instructions of the first baronet, Robert Throckmorton, by Lancelot Brown remain just as they were in Cowper's time. With the fifth baronet, Sir John Courtenay Throckmorton, who died in 1819, Cowper, who became acquainted with him in 1784, was on very friendly terms, as his correspondence and several of his poems show.

One of the advantages he had at Weston was that he was within a few hundred yards of the grounds which at Olney were more than a mile from him. To them he had access here through a door in the boundary wall, letting himself in from the road by a private key.

Let us now accompany him step by step—for we can do so with ease—through the scenes which he has painted so vividly for all time. Leaving Orchard Side and proceeding along the Weston road for about a quarter of a mile, we turn into a field on the right-hand side. This brings us into what is known as The Pightle. Crossing this, we make our way along a grass-grown, rutty cart-road up a gently-ascending



eminence, three or four hundred yards bringing us very gradually to the highest point. We now have before us what is photographed in the First Book of *The Task* (134-179). It was here, on this eminence, that Cowper, with Mrs. Unwin on his arm, delighted to pause :—

How oft upon yon eminence our pace  
Has slacken'd to a pause, and we have borne  
The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,  
While Admiration, feeding at the eye,  
And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene.  
Thence with what pleasure have we just discern'd  
The distant plough slow moving, and beside  
His labouring team, that swerv'd not from the track,  
The sturdy swain diminished to a boy !  
Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain  
Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkl'd o'er,  
Conducts the eye along his sinuous course  
Delighted. There, fast rooted in their bank,  
Stand, never overlook'd, our favourite elms,  
That screen the herdsman's solitary hut ;  
While far beyond, and overthwart the stream,  
That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale,  
The sloping land recedes into the clouds ;  
Displaying on its varied side, the grace  
Of hedge-row beauties numberless, square tower,<sup>1</sup>  
Tall spire,<sup>2</sup> from which the sound of cheerful bells  
Just undulates upon the listening ear,  
Groves, heaths, and smoking villages, remote.  
Scenes must be beautiful which, daily view'd,  
Please daily, and whose novelty survives  
Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years.

In the Sixth Book (58-84) the same scene is sketched in winter :—

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<sup>1</sup> Clifton Reynes church steeple.

<sup>2</sup> Olney steeple.



Now at noon

Upon the southern side of the slant hills,  
And where the woods fence off the northern blast,  
The season smiles, resigning all its rage,  
And has the warmth of May. The vault is blue  
Without a cloud, and white without a speck  
The dazzling splendour of the scene below.  
Again the harmony comes o'er the vale ;  
And through the trees I view the embattled tower,  
Whence all the music. I again perceive  
The soothing influence of the wafted strains,  
And settle in soft musings as I tread  
The walk, still verdant, under oaks and elms,  
Whose outspread branches overarch the glade.  
The roof, though moveable through all its length  
As the wind sways it, has yet well suffic'd,  
And, intercepting in their silent fall  
The frequent flakes, has kept a path for me.  
No noise is here, or none that hinders thought.  
The redbreast warbles still, but is content  
With slender notes, and more than half suppressed ;  
Pleased with his solitude, and fitting light  
From spray to spray, where'er he rests he shakes  
From many a twig the pendent drops of ice,  
That tinkle in the wither'd leaves below.  
Stillness, accompanied with sounds so soft,  
Charms more than silence.

In the latter part of this description we can easily see that he had moved on to the coppice or spinny some quarter of a mile onward. To the sound of the Emberton bells, which still falls on our ear, as we stand there, just as it did on Cowper's more than a century ago, he refers again in a beautiful passage at the beginning of the Book (1-12) :—

There is in souls a sympathy with sounds,  
And as the mind is pitch'd the ear is pleased

With melting airs or martial, brisk or grave ;  
 Some chord in unison with what we hear  
 Is touch'd within us, and the heart replies.  
 How soft the music of those village bells,  
 Falling at intervals upon the ear  
 In cadence sweet, now dying all away,  
 Now pealing loud again, and louder still,  
 Clear and sonorous, as the gale comes on !  
 With easy force it opens all the cells  
 Where Memory slept.

Before passing on, we may pause to note that in the valley meadow opposite this eminence, and just outside the town where Goosey Bridge spans the Ouse, occurred the incident commemorated in *The Dog and the Water-Lily*. One feature in the landscape has, unhappily, disappeared :—

The bridge  
 That with its wearisome but needful length  
 Bestrides the wintry flood.

This, having become hopelessly dilapidated, was taken down in 1832. Continuing our walk, we pass through a gate where a descent begins into a wide-stretching field of springy turf, undulating with molehills. On an eminence in front of us to the right is the Peasant's Nest, in Cowper's time a picturesque, thatch-roofed little cottage half-hidden in trees—now a trim modern farm roofed with tiles :—

Once went I forth, and found, till then unknown,  
 A cottage, whither oft we since repair :  
 'Tis perch'd upon the green hill-top, but close  
 Environ'd with a ring of branching elms,  
 That overhang the thatch, itself unseen

Peeps at the vale below ; so thick beset  
With foliage of such dark redundant growth,  
I called the low-roof'd lodge the Peasant's Nest.

*The Task*, I. 221-227.

Now, striking to the left and making our way down a clover-sown, descending field, and passing over a shallow brook through a little gate, we find ourselves in the First Spinnie, as it is locally called ; the Shrubbery, as Cowper generally calls it. We are in the grounds of the Throckmortons, and in the very centre of the haunts so loved and so lovingly described by the poet. We are in a delicious thick-wooded solitude—with trees and shrubs on both sides, the trees overarching and the shrubs admitting only at intervals the narrowest of paths. A couple of hundred yards to the right brings us to the site of the Moss House, which, as Cowper knew it, was a simple stone structure with thatched roof overgrown with ivy and moss, having on one side of it a weeping willow and in front a circular sheet of water. Now all these have disappeared, and all that remains is the site, a cleared space with two yew trees on each side of it ; the bed of what was the sheet of circular water is still, however, clearly discernible in a shallow hollow in the greenery. Impressive indeed it is to stand there and to recall two scenes of which it was the witness—one associated with the happy days preceding the breach with Lady Austen, and one of which a poem is the record.

Yesterday we [Cowper, Mrs. Unwin, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, and Lady Austen] all dined together in the Spinnie, a most delightful

retirement. Lady Austen's lackey and a lad that waits on me in the garden drove a wheelbarrow full of eatables and drinkables to the scene of our *fête champêtre*. A board laid over the top of the wheelbarrow served us for a table: our dining-room was a root-house lined with moss and ivy. At six o'clock the servants, who had dined under a great elm upon the ground, at a little distance, boiled the kettle, and the said wheelbarrow served us for a tea-table. We then took a walk into the Wilderness about half a mile off, and were at home again a little after eight, having spent the day together from noon till evening without one cross occurrence or the least weariness of each other: a happiness few parties of pleasure can boast of.<sup>1</sup>

Of a very different mood the poem is the record.

#### THE SHRUBBERY

WRITTEN IN A TIME OF AFFLICTION

O happy shades—to me unblest!

Friendly to peace, but not to me!

How ill the scene that offers rest,

And heart that cannot rest, agree!

This glassy stream, that spreading pine,

These alders quivering to the breeze,

Might soothe a soul less hurt than mine,

And please, if any thing could please.

For all that pleased in wood or lawn,

While Peace possessed these silent bowers,

Her animating smile withdrawn,

Has lost its beauties and its powers.

The Saint or Moralist should tread

This moss-grown alley musing, slow;

They seek like me the secret shade,

But not like me to nourish woe!

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<sup>1</sup> Southey's *Cowper*, vol. iv. 118-119.

We leave the Moss House and, threading our way along the narrow path, in the direction of the Peasant's Nest, come to a gate which opens on to a hilly field. Here, and in the immediate neighbourhood, or possibly a little farther on and nearer Weston, may be confidently located what is described in the following passage in *The Winter Walk at Noon* (296-320) :—

Neither mist,  
 Nor freezing sky nor sultry, checking me,  
 Nor stranger, intermeddling with my joy.  
 E'en in the spring and playtime of the year,  
 That calls the unwonted villager abroad  
 With all her little ones, a sportive train,  
 To gather kingcups in the yellow mead,  
 And prink their hair with daisies, or to pick  
 A cheap but wholesome salad from the brook,  
 These shades are all my own. The tim'rous hare,  
 Grown so familiar with her frequent guest,  
 Scarce shuns me ; and the stock-dove unalarmed  
 Sits cooing in the pine-tree, nor suspends  
 His long love-ditty for my near approach.  
 Drawn from his refuge in some lonely elm,  
 That age or injury has hollowed deep,  
 Where, on his bed of wool and matted leaves,  
 He has outslept the winter, ventures forth  
 To frisk awhile, and bask in the warm sun,  
 The squirrel, flippant, pert, and full of play ;  
 He sees me, and at once, swift as a bird,  
 Ascends the neighbouring beech ; there whisks his brush,  
 And perks his ears, and stamps, and scolds aloud,  
 With all the prettiness of feign'd alarm,  
 And anger insignificantly fierce.

Passing through this field with its leaf-covered brook, the Ho-brook, Cowper's "weedy ditch"—it had been



running parallel with us all through the Spinnie on our right hand—we come to the Second Spinnie. A narrow, grassy path winding through a bosky solitude of beeches, chestnuts, and hazels, conducts to a sombre congregation of yew trees—the Yew Grove. On emerging from the Yew Grove we enter the fine Chestnut Avenue.

Not distant far, a length of Colonnade  
Invites us. Monument of ancient taste,  
Now scorned.

Thanks to Benevolus: he spares me yet  
These chestnuts ranged in corresponding lines;  
And, though himself so polished, still reprieves  
The obsolete prolixity of shade.

*The Task*, I. 252-265.

On our left hand is a noble sweep of thickly-wooded semicircle; a deep-rutted, grass-grown lane conducts us through the avenue which suddenly forms a steep descent leading through a little gate to the Rustic Bridge.

Descending now (but cautious, lest too fast,)  
A sudden steep, upon a Rustic Bridge  
We pass a gulf, in which the willows dip  
Their pendent boughs, stooping as if to drink.

*Idem*, 266-269.

The willows have, alas, disappeared and the gulf is now in summer a dry hollow. And now we can either go straight along through an avenue of oaks up a steep ascent, or ascend, on the left, a broad, open expanse of springy turf, undulating with mole-hills, making our



way to the northern extremity of the park, as Cowper describes :—

Hence, ancle deep in moss and flowery thyme,  
We mount again, and feel at every step  
Our foot half sunk in hillocks green and soft,  
Raised by the mole, the miner of the soil.

*Idem*, 270-273.

We have now gained the summit, and right in front of us is the Alcove ; here every detail is photographed by Cowper, even to the defacements on the walls of the Alcove. The Alcove, rebuilt or much repaired since Cowper's time, protected by rails in front, is hexagon in shape, with three sides open, and was built by John Higgins for Sir Robert Throckmorton in 1753. The view as we stand in front of it is superb, being especially remarkable for the sylvan pomp of extraordinarily diversified trees. But we leave Cowper to describe it :—

The summit gained, behold the proud alcove  
That crowns it ! yet not all its pride secures  
The grand retreat from injuries impressed  
By rural carvers, who with knives deface  
The panels, leaving an obscure, rude name,  
In characters uncouth, and spelt amiss.

Now roves the eye ;  
And, posted on this speculative height,  
Exults in its command. The sheepfold here  
Pours out its fleecy tenants o'er the glebe.  
At first, progressive as a stream, they seek  
The middle field ; but, scatter'd by degrees,  
Each to his choice, soon whiten all the land.  
There from the sunburnt hay-field homeward creeps

## POETS' COUNTRY

The loaded wain ; while, lightened of its charge,  
The wain that meets it passes swiftly by.

Nor less attractive is the woodland scene,  
Diversified with trees of every growth,  
Alike, yet various. Here the grey smooth trunks  
Of ash, or lime, or beech, distinctly shine  
Within the twilight of their distant shades ;  
There, lost behind a rising ground, the wood  
Seems sunk, and shortened to its topmost boughs.  
No tree in all the grove but has its charms,  
Though each its hue peculiar ; paler some,  
And of a wannish grey ; the willow such,  
And poplar, that with silver lines his leaf,  
And ash far-stretching his umbrageous arm ;  
Of deeper green the elm ; and deeper still,  
Lord of the woods, the long-surviving oak.  
Some glossy-leaved and shining in the sun,  
The maple, and the beech of oily nuts  
Prolific, and the lime at dewy eve  
Diffusing odours ; nor unnoted pass  
The sycamore, capricious in attire,  
Now green, now tawny, and ere autumn yet  
Have changed the woods, in scarlet honours bright.  
O'er these, but far beyond (a spacious map  
Of hill and valley interposed between,)  
The Ouse, dividing the well-watered land,  
Now glitters in the sun, and now retires,  
As bashful, yet impatient to be seen.

*The Sofa, 279-325.*

About forty yards in front of the Alcove the ground suddenly dips into a narrow runnel which, dry in summer but flooded in winter, intersects the grassy expanse and then as suddenly ascends into a steepy eminence.

So Cowper continues :—

Hence the declivity is sharp and short,  
And such the re-ascent; between them weeps  
A little Naiad her impoverished urn  
All summer long, which winter fills again.

*Idem*, 326-328.

In a line with the Alcove, just in front of it, about a quarter of a mile distant, is a superb lime-tree avenue, traversed by a grassy path. But let Cowper describe:—

Ye fallen avenues! once more I mourn  
Your fate unmerited, once more rejoice  
That yet a remnant of your race survives.  
How airy and how light the graceful arch,  
Yet awful as the consecrated roof  
Re-echoing pious anthems! while beneath  
The checker'd earth seems restless as a flood  
Brushed by the wind. So sportive is the light  
Shot through the boughs, it dances as they dance,  
Shadow and sunshine intermingling quick,  
And darkening and enlightening, as the leaves  
Play wanton, every moment, every spot.

*Idem*, 338-348.

From the Lime Avenue we pass into the Wilderness.

We tread the Wilderness, whose well-roll'd walks  
With curvature of slow and easy sweep—  
Deception innocent—give ample space  
To narrow bounds.

This was Cowper's favourite haunt, both when he was at Olney and when he was at Weston, a private key letting him into the enclosure. The rooks still ceaselessly caw in the elms near; there are the walks intersecting it through which he so often wandered both alone and with his friends, and there the Gothic

Temple which has recently been repaired. But the glories among which Cowper strayed :—

Laburnum, rich  
 In streaming gold ; Syringa, ivory pure ;  
 The scentless and the scented Rose ; this red,  
 And of an humbler growth, the other tall  
 And throwing up into the darkest gloom  
 Of neighbouring Cypress, or more sable Yew,  
 Her silver globes, light as the foamy surf  
 That the wind severs from the broken wave ;  
 The Lilac, various in array, now white,  
 Now sanguine, and her beauteous head now set  
 With purple spikes pyramidal, as if  
 Studious of ornament, yet unresolved  
 Which hue she most approved, she chose them all ;  
 Copious of flowers the Woodbine, pale and wan,  
 But well compensating their sickly looks  
 With never-cloying odours, early and late ;  
 Hypericum all bloom, so thick a swarm  
 Of flowers, like flies clothing her slender rods,  
 That scarce a leaf appears ; Mezereon too,  
 Though leafless, well attired, and thick beset  
 With blushing wreaths, investing every spray ;  
 Althæa with the purple eye ; the Broom,  
 Yellow and bright, as bullion unalloyed,  
 Her blossoms ; and luxuriant above all  
 The Jasmine, throwing wide her elegant sweets,  
 The deep dark green of whose unvarnished leaf  
 Makes more conspicuous, and illumines more  
 The bright profusion of her scattered stars—

(*Winter Walk at Noon*, 149-176)

—some of these remain, but most have disappeared. The broad walk which borders the northern side of the Wilderness has more than one object vividly recalling the poet. We find, for instance, the urn on which is

engraved the well-known epitaph on Sir John Throckmorton's pointer, beginning—

Here lies one who never drew  
Blood himself, yet many slew, etc. ;

and another urn to the memory of Fop, Lady Throckmorton's puppy, with the epitaph written by Cowper inscribed on the pedestal. Here, too, may be seen the bust of Homer, with the Greek distich from Cowper's pen, which was presented to him by his friend Johnson, and which formerly stood in the "Shrubbery" at Weston Lodge.

But there are other localities about Weston and Olney not included in the semicircle just traversed by us, which have also found their laureate in Cowper and which are quite as intimately associated with him. We pass out of the Wilderness into a lane running parallel with the Lime Walk Avenue—not, as Cowper could do, through a door in the boundary-wall, but from the high-road. A few hundred yards brings us parallel with the Alcove; we turn sharply to the right and pass along the lane running at the back of the Alcove. A gate leads us into "Stumpy Field." We make our way over its steepy undulating surface, and see on an eminence to the right Hungry Hall, with its spinnie trees dotted with magpies' nests. Then, making our way by a level-crossing, we pass over the Midland Railway, a richly-wooded country on all sides of us. To our left, a thick mass of green foliage, is Dingleberry; just in front, slightly inclining towards

the left, is "Kilwick's echoing wood." In the field we are traversing we have the scene of *The Needless Alarm* :

There is a field, through which I often pass,  
Thick overspread with moss and silky grass,  
Adjoining close to Kilwick's echoing wood.

A narrow brook, by rushy banks conceal'd,  
Runs in a bottom, and divides the field ;  
Oaks intersperse it, that had once a head,  
But now wear crests of oven-wood instead.

Sheep graz'd the field ; some with soft bosom press'd  
The herb as soft, while nibbling stray'd the rest.

But see the whole charming poem.

A gate admits us into the wood. As we enter we see in front of us a long, ruddy, grassy vista, till we come to a point with an avenue to the right and an avenue to the left. We take the turn to the left, along a grassy path fragrant with the perfume of wild mint, trees on each side of us, some of them festooned with twining woodbine and trailers. Here, perhaps, Cowper found the original of:—

As woodbine weds the plant within her reach,  
Rough elm, or smooth-grained ash, or glossy beech,  
In spiral rings ascends the trunk, and lays  
Her golden tassels on the leafy sprays.

*Retirement, 229-232.*

At the end a gate admits us into what is now known as Cowper's Oak Field, and right in front of us, in imposing singularity, is the famous Yardley Oak :—







Survivor sole, and hardly such, of all  
 That once lived here, thy brethren!—at my birth  
 (Since which I number threescore winters past)  
 A shattered veteran, hollow-trunked perhaps,  
 As now, and with excoriate forks deform.

Time made thee what thou wast, king of the woods,  
 And Time hath made thee what thou art—a cave  
 For owls to roost in. Once thy spreading boughs  
 O'erhung the champaign; and the numerous flocks  
 That grazed it stood beneath that ample cope  
 Uncrowded, yet safe-sheltered from the storm.  
 No flock frequents thee now. Thou hast outlived  
 Thy popularity, and art become  
 (Unless verse rescue thee awhile) a thing  
 Forgotten, as the foliage of thy youth.

First a seedling, hid in grass;  
 Then twig; then sapling; and, as century rolled  
 Slow after century, a giant-bulk  
 Of girth enormous, with moss-cushioned root  
 Upheaved above the soil, and sides embossed  
 With prominent wens globose,—till at the last  
 The rottenness, which Time is charged to inflict  
 On other mighty ones, found also thee.

Thine arms have left thee. Winds have rent them off  
 Long since, and rovers of the forest wild  
 With bow and shaft have burnt them. Some have left  
 A splintered stump, bleached to a snowy white:  
 And some memorial none, where once they grew.  
 Yet Life still lingers in thee, and puts forth  
 Proof not contemptible of what she can,  
 Even where Death predominates. The Spring  
 Finds thee not less alive to her sweet force  
 Than yonder upstarts of the neighbouring wood,  
 So much thy juniors, who their birth received  
 Half a millennium since the date of thine.

More than a century and a quarter has passed since the eyes of Cowper rested on it, and he recorded what he saw. Since then scarcely any change is perceptible in its remains; we see it as Cowper saw it. No doubt he would have been gratified had he witnessed what is now a conspicuous feature in it, though it scarcely adds to its beauty, a placard bearing the following inscription:—

Out of respect to the memory of the poet Cowper, the Marquis of Northampton is particularly desirous of preserving this oak. Notice is hereby given that any person defacing or otherwise injuring it will be prosecuted according to law—

a pious if prosaic provision which has no doubt prevented this memorable relic from being carried bodily away by relic-hunters.

A few yards to the left is another oak, which must also have existed in Cowper's time.

Leaving the oak behind us, we now enter Yardley Chase.

The grassy swarth, close cropped by nibbling sheep,  
And skirted thick with intertexture firm  
Of thorny boughs—

a favourite haunt of Cowper's. About a mile onward, near what was in his time known as Chase Farm, but what is now called the Ranger's Lodge, there is another gigantic oak known to him as "Judith," because there was a tradition that it had been planted by the Lady Judith, niece to William the Conqueror and the wife of Earl Waltheof, but now usually called "Gog."

Of Yardley Chase we have a vivid sketch in *The Sofa*, 526 *seqq.* :—

The common, overgrown with fern, and rough  
With prickly gorse, that, shapeless and deformed,  
And dangerous to the touch, has yet its bloom,  
And decks itself with ornaments of gold,  
Yields no unpleasing ramble ; there the turf  
Smells fresh, and, rich in odoriferous herbs  
And fungous fruits of earth, regales the sense  
With luxury of unexpected sweets.

Then, as now, it was a favourite resort of gipsies,  
and what he describes in the lines :—

I see a column of slow-rising smoke  
O'ertop the lofty wood that skirts the wild.

A kettle, slung

Between two poles upon a stick transverse,  
Receives the morsel—flesh obscene of dog,  
Or vermin, or at best of cock purloin'd  
From his accustom'd perch,

may still often be seen as the tourist explores these haunts.

It remains to notice one or two other favourite haunts of Cowper, descriptions of which may be found in his poems. For this purpose we must return to Olney. He would often make his way along the foot-path to Clifton Reynes, passing the Church, the Rectory, and the Hall—of which all that remains now is one of its appurtenances, the circular dovecot. On his way he would linger by the old water-mill, and here one

winter morning he saw what he so vividly describes in the Fifth Book of *The Task* :—

On the flood,  
 Indurated and fixed, the snowy weight  
 Lies undissolv'd ; while silently beneath,  
 And unperceived, the current steals away.  
 Not so where, scornful of a check, it leaps  
 The mill-dam, dashes on the restless wheel,  
 And wantons in the pebbly gulf below :  
 No frost can bind it there ; its utmost force  
 Can but arrest the light and smoky mist,  
 That in its fall the liquid sheet throws wide.  
 And see where it has hung the embroidered banks  
 With forms so various, that no powers of art,  
 The pencil or the pen, may trace the scene !  
 Here glittering turrets rise, upbearing high  
 (Fantastic misarrangement !) on the roof,  
 Large growth of what may seem the sparkling trees  
 And shrubs of fairy land. The crystal drops,  
 That trickle down the branches, fast congeal'd,  
 Shoot into pillars of pellucid length,  
 And prop the pile they but adorned before.

The wet, marshy track through the fields between Olney and Clifton Reynes is the scene of the amusing poem, *The Distressed Travellers*. The beautiful view from the ridge of Clifton Hill furnishes him, like that “from the Eminence,” with all the details of his most characteristic prospect-pictures.

Another favourite walk for some years was to the poplar field at Lavendon Mill. “There was,” he says in a letter to Lady Hesketh, dated May 1, 1786, “in a neighbouring parish called Lavendon, a field, one side of which formed a terrace, and the other was planted



with poplars, at whose foot ran the Ouse, that I used to account a little paradise; but the poplars have been felled, and the scene has suffered so much by the loss that, though still in point of prospect beautiful, it has not charm sufficient to attract me now." This forms the subject of one of the most charming of his poems, *The Poplar Field*:—

The poplars are felled ;—farewell to the shade,  
And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade ;  
The winds play no longer and sing in the leaves,  
Nor Ouse on his bosom their image receives.

Twelve years have elapsed, since I last took a view  
Of my favourite field, and the bank where they grew ;  
And now in the grass behold they are laid,  
And the tree is my seat, that once lent me a shade.

The blackbird is fled to another retreat,  
Where the hazels afford him a screen from the heat,  
And the scene, where his melody charm'd me before,  
Resounds with his sweet-flowing ditty no more.

My fugitive years are all hasting away,  
And I must ere long lie as lowly as they,  
With a turf on my breast, and a stone at my head,  
Ere another such grove shall arise in its stead.

At the beautiful old mansion of Gayhurst, so intimately associated with the Gunpowder Plot conspiracy, he was a frequent visitor. Under its then owner, a Mr. Wrighte, it was celebrated for its pine-apples, a present of which inspired Cowper's graceful little apologue, *The Pineapple and the Bee*.

It must certainly remain matter for congratulation that there still remain, in these all-transforming times, scenes which recall so exactly a world long passed away—a world consecrated by a poet who for very many of his fellow-men can never lose his charm. No one can traverse them with his poems in their hands without the liveliest admiration for the studious and happy fidelity with which he painted what he saw. As minutely and scrupulously truthful as Gilbert White, he has done for Olney and Weston what White did for Selborne; but, a true poet, he has done incomparably more—he has consecrated as well as described.

## CRABBE AND ALDBOROUGH

WHAT Stoke Pogis and its neighbourhood was to Gray, what Olney and Weston were to Cowper, that is Aldborough to Crabbe. Crabbe's descriptive poetry is essentially local, its source was always from what surrounded him and daily met his eyes. He was associated with other places besides Aldborough—with Woodbridge, with Stathern in Rutlandshire, with Muston in Leicestershire, with Parham, Glemham, and Rendham in Suffolk, and lastly with Trowbridge in Wiltshire, where he lived for the last eighteen years of his life. And the scenery of most of these places and of those in the neighbourhood may be traced occasionally in his poetry. But more than two-thirds of what he has described centres round Aldborough. Here in humble life, the son of one of the collectors of the salt-duties, in the town, he was born on Christmas Eve in 1754. Here he lived till his eighteenth year in the heart of its marine life, with every nook and cranny of it familiar to him—the sea in all its moods and aspects, the dreary marsh wastes, the river, the mud-banks, the shingly beach, the arid sand tracks, and “the wild amphibious race”

which people its fishing-smacks and its hovels. Here, after walking the hospitals in London, he set up in practice, dismally to fail; and here too, after starvation, literally staring him in the face, had driven him to exchange Medicine for the Church, he had his first curacy. It was thus associated with the most impressionable and the most momentous period of his whole life, and indeed his work generally as a poet took its ply and its colour from these early associations.

Beyond the general features of its sea and background, there is nothing in the Aldborough of to-day which reminds us of the Aldborough of Crabbe's photographs. In his time it consisted of two parallel and unpaved streets running between mean and scrambling cabins occupied by seafaring men, fishermen, and pilots. "The beach"—let me borrow the description given by Crabbe's son in his admirable biography of his father—"consists of successive ridges, large rolled stones, then loose shingles, and at the fall of the tide a strip of fine hard sand. . . . The broad river called the Ald approaches the sea close to Aldborough within a few hundred yards, and then turning abruptly continues to run about ten miles parallel with the beach, from which, for the most part, a dreary strip of marsh and waste alone divides it, until it at length finds its embouchure at Orford." Crabbe has given us pictures of the whole line of the coast from Orford to Dunwick, Slaughden Quay in particular being elaborated, as

his son says, with all the minuteness of a Dutch landscape.

With ceaseless motion comes and goes the tide,  
Flowing, it fills the channel vast and wide ;  
Then back to sea, with strong majestic sweep  
It rolls, in ebb yet terrible and deep ;  
Here Samphire-banks and Saltwort bound the flood,  
There stakes and sea-weeds withering on the mud ;  
And higher up, a ridge of all things base,  
Which some strong tide has roll'd upon the place.

*The Borough, Letter 1.*

In the Twenty-Second Letter of the same poem is painted this scene on the River Ald as it flows past Slaughden Quay :—

At the same time the same dull views to see,  
The bounding marsh-bank and the blighted tree ;  
The water only, when the tides were high,  
When low, the mud half-cover'd and half-dry ;  
The sunburnt tar that blisters on the planks,  
And bank-side stakes in their uneven ranks ;  
Heaps of entangled weeds that slowly float,  
As the tide rolls by the impeded boat.  
When tides were neap, and, in the sultry day,  
Through the tall bounding mud-banks made their way,  
Which on each side rose swelling, and below  
The dark, warm flood ran silently and slow ;  
There anchoring, Peter chose from man to hide,  
There hang his head, and view the lazy tide  
In its hot, slimy channel slowly glide ;  
Where the small eels that left the deeper way  
For the warm shore, within the shallows play ;  
Where gaping muscles, left upon the mud,  
Slope their slow passage to the fallen flood :—  
Here, dull and hopeless, he'd lie down and trace  
How sidelong crabs had scrawl'd their crooked race,

R

Or sadly listen to the tuneless cry  
 Of fishing gull or clanging golden-eye ;  
 What time the sea-birds to the marsh would come,  
 And the loud bittern, from the bull-rush home,  
 Gave from the salt ditch side the bellowing boom.  
*The Borough, Letter XXII.*

In the Ninth Letter we have the same scene by  
 moonlight :—

What time the moon arising shows the mud,  
 A shining border to the silver flood ;  
 When, by her dubious light, the meanest views,  
 Chalk, stones, and stakes, obtain the richest hues ;  
 And when the cattle, as they gazing stand,  
 Seem nobler objects than when viewed from land ;  
 Then anchor'd vessels in the way appear,  
 And sea-boys greet them as they pass—"What cheer?"  
 The sleeping shell-ducks at the sound arise,  
 And utter loud their unharmonious cries ;  
 Fluttering they move their weedy beds among,  
 Or, instant diving, hide their plumeless young.  
*The Borough, Letter IX.*

Not less vivid in its elaborate realism is the picture  
 given in *The Lover's Journey* of the scenery between  
 Aldborough and Beccles :—

On either side  
 Is level fen, a prospect wild and wide,  
 With dikes on either hand by Ocean's self supplied.  
 Far on the right the distant sea is seen,  
 And salt the springs that feed the marsh between ;  
 Beneath an ancient bridge, the straiten'd flood  
 Rolls through its sloping banks of slimy mud ;  
 Near it a sunken boat resists the tide,  
 That frets and hurries to th' opposing side ;  
 The rushes sharp, that on the borders grow,



Bend their brown flow'rets to the stream below,  
Impure in all its course, in all its progress slow ;  
Here a grave Flora scarcely deigns to bloom,  
Nor wears a rosy blush, nor sheds perfume ;  
The few dull flowers that o'er the place are spread  
Partake the nature of their fenny bed ;  
Here on its wiry stem, in rigid bloom,  
Grows the salt lavender that lacks perfume ;  
Here the dwarf sallows creep, the sept-foil harsh,  
And the soft, slimy mallow of the marsh ;  
Low on the ear the distant billows sound,  
And just in view appears their stony bound ;  
No hedge nor tree conceals the glowing sun,  
Birds, save a wat'ry tribe, the district shun,  
Nor chirp among the reeds where bitter waters run.

*Tales, X.*

Now, turning from these marine pictures, let us take  
a companion one of the heath track adjoining the coast :

Lo ! where the heath, with withering brake grown o'er,  
Lends the light turf that warms the neighbouring poor :  
From thence a length of burning sand appears,  
Where the thin harvest waves its wither'd ears ;  
Rank weeds, that every art and care defy,  
Reign o'er the land, and rob the blighted rye :  
There thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,  
And to the ragged infants threaten war ;  
There poppies nodding, mock the hope of toil ;  
There the blue bugloss paints the sterile soil ;  
Hardy and high, above the slender sheaf,  
The slimy mallow waves her silky leaf ;  
O'er the young shoot the charlock throws a shade,  
And clasping tares cling round the sickly blade ;  
With mingled tints the rocky coasts abound,  
And a sad splendour vainly shines around.

*The Village, Book I.*

How vivid, too, is his picture of the approach to

the sea from the inland fields and the walk along the shore :—

Through the green lane,—then linger in the mead,—  
 Stray o'er the heath in all its purple bloom,—  
 And pluck the blossom where the wild bees hum ;  
 Then through the broomy bound with ease they pass,  
 And press the sandy sheep-walk's slender grass,  
 Where dwarfish flowers among the gorse are spread,  
 And the lamb browses by the linnet's bed ;  
 Then 'cross the bounding brook they make their way  
 O'er its rough bridge—and there behold the bay !—  
 The ocean smiling to the fervid sun—  
 The waves that faintly fall and slowly run—  
 The ships at distance and the boats at hand.

Ships softly sinking in the sleepy sea :  
 Now arm in arm, now parted, they behold  
 The glitt'ring waters on the shingles roll'd.

And search for crimson weeds, which spreading flow,  
 Or lie like pictures on the sand below ;  
 With all those bright red pebbles, that the sun  
 Through the small waves so softly shines upon ;  
 And those live lucid jellies which the eye  
 Delights to trace as they swim glittering by.

*The Borough, Letter XXIII.*

In the following passage we have a wonderfully graphic picture of the wide barren heathlands which stretch beyond Leiston Common towards Dunwick :—

“This neat low gorse,” said he, “with golden bloom,  
 Delights each sense, is beauty, is perfume ;  
 And this gay ling, with all its purple flowers,  
 A man at leisure might admire for hours ;  
 This green-fring'd cup-moss has a scarlet tip.”

Onward he went, and fiercer grew the heat,  
 Dust rose in clouds before his horse's feet ;  
 For now he pass'd through lanes of burning sand,  
 Bounds to thin crops or yet uncultur'd land ;  
 Where the dark poppy flourish'd on the dry  
 And sterile soil, and mock'd the thin-set rye.

The very lane has sweets that all admire,  
 The rambling suckling, and the vigorous brier ;  
 See ! wholesome wormwood grows beside the way,  
 Where, dew-press'd yet, the dog-rose bends the spray ;  
 Fresh herbs the fields, fair shrubs the banks adorn,  
 And snow-white bloom falls flaky from the thorn.

A botanist and zoologist, he delights, like Tennyson, in minutely discriminating particulars, as in the epithets in the lines already quoted :—

Here on its wiry stem, in rigid bloom,  
 Grows the salt lavender that lacks perfume ;  
 Here the dwarf sallows creep, the sept-foil harsh,  
 And the soft, slimy mallow of the marsh ;

or take the description of *Lepraria Jolithus* in the Second Letter of *The Borough* :—

See how Nature's work is done,  
 How slowly true she lays her colours on ;  
 When her least speck upon the hardest flint  
 Has mark and form, and is a living tint ;  
 And so embodied with the rock, that few  
 Can the small germ upon the substance view.

There, in the rugged soil, [seeds] safely dwell,  
 Till showers and suns the subtle atoms swell,  
 And spread th' enduring foliage ;—then we trace  
 The freckled flower upon the flinty base ;  
 These all increase, till in unnoticed years  
 The stony tower as grey with age appears ;

With coats of vegetation, thinly spread,  
 Coat above coat, the living on the dead :  
 These then dissolve to dust, and make a way  
 For bolder foliage, nurs'd by their decay.

The sea in all its moods and phases, in all its infinite variety, with all its associations and phenomena, the life that fills it, the birds that haunt it, its splendours and its glooms from sun and moon and night and sweeping or brooding cloud, he has painted as no poet since Homer has done. Look at the following :—

Then the broad bosom of the ocean keeps  
 An equal motion ; swelling as it sleeps,  
 Then slowly sinking ; curling to the strand,  
 Faint, lazy waves o'ercreep the rigid sand,  
 Or tap the tarry boat with gentle blow,  
 And back return in silence, smooth and slow.  
*The Borough, Letter I.*

When were sea-gulls painted like this ?—

Pleasant it was to view the sea-gulls strive  
 Against the storm, or in the ocean dive  
 With eager scream, or when they dropping gave  
 Their closing wings, to sail upon the wave ;  
 Then as the winds and waters rag'd around,  
 And breaking billows mix'd their deafening sound,  
 They on the rolling deep securely hung,  
 And calmly rode the restless waves among.  
 Nor pleased it less around me to behold,  
 Far up the beach, the yesty sea-foam roll'd ;  
 Or from the shore upborne, to see on high  
 Its frothing flakes in wild confusion fly :  
 While the salt spray that clashing billows form  
 Gave to the taste a feeling of the storm.

*Tales of the Hall, Book IV.*

It may be added that the whole of the scene of which this is a part is almost a photograph of the desolate marshland between Aldborough and Orford.

In the following picture Crabbe is not perhaps at his best, but it is vivid :—

The breaking billows cast the flying foam  
Upon the billows rising—all the deep  
Is restless change ; the waves so swell'd and steep,  
Breaking and sinking, and the sunken swells,  
Nor one, one moment, in its station dwells ;  
But nearer land you may the billows trace,  
As if contending in their watery chase ;  
May watch the mightiest till the shoal they reach,  
Then break and hurry to their utmost stretch ;  
Curl'd as they come, they strike with furious force,  
And then re-flowing, take their grating course,  
Raking the rounded flints.

*The Borough*, Letter I.

The picture of the shipwreck at night in the First Letter of *The Borough* is sublime :—

From parted clouds the moon her radiance throws  
On the wild waves, and all the dangers shows,  
But shows them beaming in her shining vest,  
Terrific splendour ! gloom in glory dress'd !  
This for a moment, and then clouds again  
Hide every beam, and fear and darkness reign.

Let us now turn to his pictures of inland scenes. Both at Muston and at his other residences in Suffolk, particularly at Glemham Hall, where he lived for nearly five years, as well as at Trowbridge, he no doubt found the archetypes of his rural pictures. The parson-

age garden at Muston he describes in the First Letter of *The Borough* :—

Seek then thy garden's shrubby bound, and look,  
As it steals by, upon the bordering brook,  
That winding streamlet, limpid, lingering slow,  
Where the reeds whisper when the zephyrs blow ;  
Where in the midst, upon a throne of green,  
Sits the large Lily as the water's queen,  
And makes the current, forc'd awhile to stay,  
Murmur and bubble as it shoots away.

It would, of course, be impossible to localise his late autumn landscape in *The Patron (Tales, V.)* :—

Cold grew the foggy morn, the day was brief,  
Loose on the cherry hung the crimson leaf,  
The dew dwelt ever on the herb : the woods  
Roar'd with strong blasts, with mighty showers the floods.  
All green was vanish'd save of pine and yew,  
That still displayed their melancholy hue,  
Save the green holly with its berries red,  
And the green moss that o'er the gravel spread.

But there are touches in the early autumn landscape—one of the gems of the *Tales of the Hall*—which recall the parsonage at Muston :—

It was a fair and mild autumnal sky,  
And earth's ripe treasures met the admiring eye,  
As a rich beauty, when her bloom is lost,  
Appears with more magnificence and cost :  
The wet and heavy grass, where feet had stray'd,  
Not yet erect, the wanderer's way betray'd ;  
Showers of the night had swell'd the deep'ning rill,  
The morning breeze had urg'd the quick'ning mill ;  
Assembled rooks had wing'd their seaward flight,  
By the same passage to return at night,



While proudly o'er them hung the steady kite,  
Then turn'd him back, and left the noisy throng,  
Nor deign'd to know them as he sail'd along.  
Long yellow leaves from ozers, strew'd around,  
Choked the small stream, and hush'd the feeble sound,  
While the dead foliage dropt from loftier trees.

Book IV.

In *Delay has Danger* (*Tales of the Hall*, Book XIII.) we have another early morning autumn scene, represented as contemplated by a man who has wrecked his life by a foolish marriage :—

Early he rose, and looked with many a sigh  
On the red light that fill'd the eastern sky.

He saw the wind upon the water blow,  
And the cold stream curl'd onward as the gale  
From the pine-hill blew harshly down the dale ;  
On the right side the youth a wood survey'd,  
With all its dark intensity of shade.

Far to the left he saw the huts of men  
Half hid in mist that hung upon the fen ;  
Before him swallows, gathering for the sea,  
Took their short flights, and twitter'd on the lea ;  
And near the bean-sheaf stood, the harvest done,  
And slowly blacken'd in the sickly sun.

Once more :—

There was a day, ere yet the Autumn closed,  
When, ere her wintry wars, the Earth reposed ;  
When from the yellow weed the feathery crown,  
Light as the curling smoke, fell slowly down ;  
When the wing'd insect settled in our sight  
And waited wind to recommence her flight ;  
When the wide river was a silver sheet,  
And on the Ocean slept th' unanchor'd fleet.

Perhaps the most charming of his inland pictures is that of the surroundings of the Ancient Mansion in the *Posthumous Tales*, and difficult indeed would it be to find its equal in minutely accurate particularity:—

How stately stand yon pines upon the hill,  
 How soft the murmurs of that living rill!  
 And o'er the park's tall paling, scarcely higher,  
 Peeps the low Church and shows the modest spire.  
 Unnumber'd violets on those banks appear,  
 And all the first-born beauties of the year.  
 The grey-green blossoms of the willows bring  
 The large wild bees upon the labouring wing;  
 Then comes the Summer with augmented pride,  
 Whose pure small streams along the valleys glide:  
 Her richer Flora their brief charms display,  
 And, as the fruit advances, fall away.  
 Then shall th' autumnal yellow clothe the leaf,  
 What time the reaper binds the burden'd sheaf:  
 Then silent groves denote the dying year,  
 The morning frost, and noontide gossamer;  
 And all be silent in the scene around,  
 All save the distant sea's uncertain sound,  
 Or here and there the gun whose loud report  
 Proclaims to man that Death is but his sport.  
 And then the wintry winds begin to blow,  
 Then fall the flaky stars of gathering snow,  
 When on the thorn the ripening sloe, yet blue,  
 Takes the bright varnish of the morning dew;  
 The aged moss grows brittle on the pale,  
 The dry boughs splinter in the windy gale,  
 And every changing season of the year  
 Stamps on the scene its English character.

Crabbe's range as a Nature-painter is, it will be seen, a restricted one, being, indeed, confined to his surroundings, practically, indeed, confined to Aldborough and

to Suffolkshire. Its characteristic is its minute and faithful realism, unilluminated by a ray of imagination or of fancy. The beautiful appears to have had little attraction for him. As in delineating human life and character he dwelt chiefly on the seamy side of both, on squalor, on ugliness, on infirmity, regarding and painting them as Hogarth did, so in the spirit of the same unlovely and ruthless realism, and with the same indifference to mere charm and beauty, he dealt with Nature. The object of *The Village* was to confront fiction with truth, to

Paint the cot  
As truth will paint it, and as bards will not.

What beauty his descriptions have is the beauty they derive from truth, the beauty which is in the objects themselves, not the beauty with which their painter has invested them. When he chose a theme like the sea and such landscapes as he has given us, he chose objects in themselves supremely beautiful, but he drew them just as he drew what was most sordid and unlovely. It has been questioned whether he can be called a poet, clinging as he did

Too close to life's realities,  
In truth to nature missing truth to art.

It may be answered that in the house of poetry there are many mansions, and that a definition of poetry which shall exclude from it such Nature-painting as

has been here illustrated would certainly have to be amended.

The effect of Crabbe's descriptive poetry is seriously impaired by its form, which was not happily chosen, failing as it does in plasticity, and, to employ a phrase of Longinus, "hanging" what it presents "with bells."

## TENNYSON

WHATEVER may be Tennyson's limitations, and whatever deduction advancing time may make from his enormous reputation among his contemporaries, of one thing there can be no doubt, that as a Nature-painter he is the most finished artist in English poetry, and, within his range, without a superior in the poetry of the world. But his range is limited. He has not the breadth and sweep of Wordsworth, or the rich complexity of Shelley; he has nothing, for example, that can compare with the landscapes in *The Excursion*, or the affluent picturesqueness which we find in *Alastor*, in *The Revolt of Islam*, or in the *Lines written among the Euganean Hills*. With one or two rare exceptions, he paints in miniature, his descriptions have the effect of exquisitely finished cameos. It is well known that he made this branch of poetry a speciality, going about with a notebook in his hand, and on the very spot fixing the features of any scene which impressed him, studying Nature indeed not merely with the eye of an artist, but as a botanist, a zoologist, a geologist studies her. As his

diction, like that of Milton and Gray, resembles mosaic work dovetailed out of felicities borrowed and assimilated from the Classics of all ages, so his imagery and Nature-pictures were simple transcripts of what a sleepless observation directed systematically to the enrichment of his poetry had supplied him with. It is certainly a little disenchanting to find a poet so deliberately making capital as it were out of Nature, and at times our consciousness that this is indeed the case seriously interferes with our enjoyment. These descriptions are sometimes not duly subordinated to the context in which they appear, and have too much the appearance of mere display; they are sometimes, we cannot but feel, over-elaborated, which has instantly the effect of falsetto. In general, however, their effect is very different. Of all poets in our language Tennyson has most of that natural magic of which Arnold speaks, that power of catching and rendering the charm and power of Nature with wonderful nearness and vividness.

But my business here is not to criticise but to illustrate; it is to point out the originals of his descriptions, and this in his case is not difficult. Tennyson, like so many other descriptive poets, drew directly from his surroundings, and his successive residences at Somersby in Lincolnshire, at Farringford in the Isle of Wight, and at Aldworth in Surrey can be distinctly traced in his poetry. If to these be added his tours about England and Wales and his tours on the



Continent, almost every elaborate Nature-painting in his work except his tropical studies can be traced to its source.

Far more intimately and extensively than any other place with which he was associated was he affected by the country of his birth, by Somersby and its neighbourhood, where he first saw the light, by Mablethorpe, where he first looked on the sea. Indeed, these places and Lincolnshire generally are to his poetry, and to his best poetry, the poems of 1842 and *In Memoriam*, all that Stoke Pogis was to Gray, Olney and Weston to Cowper, and Aldborough to Crabbe. He was born, as every one knows, at the parsonage at Somersby, where his father was rector. The rectory garden is described in the *Ode to Memory* :—

A garden bower'd close  
With plaited alleys of the trailing rose,  
Long alleys falling down to twilight grots,  
Or opening upon level plots  
Of crowned lilies, standing near  
Purple-spiked lavender.

Again more fully in *A Song* :—

A spirit haunts the year's last hours ;

and still more charmingly in the hundred and first section of *In Memoriam* :—

Unwatch'd, the garden bough shall sway,  
The tender blossom flutter down,  
Unloved, that beech will gather brown,  
This maple burn itself away ;

Unloved, the sun-flower, shining fair,  
 Ray round with flames her disk of seed,  
 And many a rose-carnation feed  
 With summer-spice the humming air.

The lawn was overshadowed on one side by witch-elms, and on the other by larch and sycamore trees, described in the eighty-ninth section of *In Memoriam* :—

Witch-elms that counterchange the floor  
 Of this flat lawn with dusk and bright ;  
 And thou, with all thy breadth and height  
 Of foliage, towering sycamore ;

and again at the end of the ninety-fifth section.

The scene from the garden and in its neighbourhood is photographed in the *Ode to Memory* :—

The woods that belt the gray hill-side,  
 The seven elms, the poplars four<sup>1</sup>  
 That stand beside my father's door,  
 And chiefly from the brook that loves  
 To purl o'er matted cress and ribbed sand,  
 Or dimple in the dark of rushy coves,  
 Drawing into his narrow earthen urn,  
 In every elbow and turn,  
 The filter'd tribute of the rough woodland.

This brook, the Somersby brook, originating in the springs past Tetford, seems to haunt Tennyson's poetry, appearing and reappearing in it as in *The Brook*, in *A Farewell*, which was dedicated to it, in *The Miller's Daughter*, and in the seventy-ninth, ninety-ninth,

<sup>1</sup> The poplars have disappeared, but the seven elms are still to be seen in the garden behind the house ; the only other change is that trees now obscure the view from the garden.





hundredth, and hundred and first sections of *In Memoriam*. It has a sandy bottom, "where," as the late Mr. Rawnsley, Tennyson's friend, said, "shoals of small fish delight to disport themselves." There can be little doubt that what Tennyson saw here suggested the simile in *Geraint and Enid* :—

Like a shoal

Of darting fish, that on a summer morn  
Adown the crystal dykes at Camelot  
Come slipping o'er their shadows on the sand,  
But if a man who stands upon the brink  
But lift a shining hand against the sun,  
There is not left the twinkle of a fin  
Betwixt the cressy islets white in flower.

Near Somersby the brook joins another from Holywell, as is described in

By that old bridge which, half in ruins then,  
Still makes a hoary eyebrow for the gleam  
Beyond it, where the waters marry.

Close to the rectory, and divided from it by a row of trees, stands Baumber's Farm, which appears to have suggested at least some touches for *Mariana in the Moated Grange*. At Mablethorpe we are brought even nearer to his poetry. Here his father took a cottage in the summer-time, close under the sea-bank, "the long low line of tussocked dunes," to which, says the present Lord Tennyson, the family resorted. Here Tennyson made his first acquaintance with the sea. To this cottage there is a reference in the *Ode to Memory* :—

A lowly cottage whence we see  
 Stretch'd wide and wild the waste enormous marsh,  
 Where from the frequent bridge,  
 Like emblems of infinity,  
 The trenched waters run from sky to sky.

He used to stand, we are told, on the sand-built ridge and think that "it was the spine-bone of the world." "From the top of this," says his son, "the weird strangeness of the place greatly moved him." On the other side of the bank there is an immense waste of sand and clay. At night on the shore, when the tide is full, the sound is amazing. As the shore is perfectly flat, the clap of the wave can be heard for miles. This furnished him many years later with one of the most vivid of his similes :—

As the crest of some slow-arching wave  
 Heard in dead night along that table-shore,  
 Drops flat, and after the great waters break  
 Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves  
 Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud,  
 From less and less to nothing.

So, too, in *The Palace of Art* :—

A still salt pool, lock'd in with bars of sand,  
 Left on the shore ; that hears all night  
 The plunging seas draw backward from the land  
 Their moon-led waters white.

Here, too, he found

The sandy tracts,  
 And the hollow ridges roaring into cataracts,

the original, probably, for the "Lover's bay" described in *The Lover's Tale*.



Returning inland, we have the characteristic  
Lincolnshire landscape in *The May Queen*,

The long gray fields at night ;  
When from the dry dark wold the summer airs blow cool  
On the oat-grass and the sword-grass, and the bulrush in the pool.

As Fitzgerald says, “the *May Queen* is all Lincolnshire inland, as *Locksley Hall* its sea-board.” We have only to climb the hill which the poet climbs in the hundredth section of *In Memoriam* to understand the truth of his local pictures : the

yonder cloud  
That rises upward always higher,  
And onward drags a labouring breast,  
And topples round the dreary west,  
A looming bastion fringed with fire ;

and

yon great plain  
That sweeps with all its autumn bowers  
And crowded farms and lessening towers  
To mingle with the bounding main ;

and the

gray old grange, or lonely fold,  
Or low morass and whispering reed,  
Or simple stile from mead to mead,  
Or sheepwalk up the windy wold ;

the

hoary knoll of ash and haw  
That hears the latest linnet trill,  
Nor quarry trench'd along the hill  
And haunted by the wrangling daw.

In *The Dying Swan* we have a photograph from the  
marshes, just as in *The Last Tournament* we have one

of his most majestic pictures of a scene which he must often have witnessed :—

O'er the illimitable reed  
And many a glancing splash and sallowy isle  
The wide-wing'd sunset of the misty marsh  
Glared.

About a furlong beyond Somersby Church is a small plantation, Holywell Glen. This was a favourite haunt of Tennyson's; it was here on the day that he heard of Byron's death that he carved on a rock the words, "Byron is dead." "As far as the sight can penetrate," I quote Mr. Cuming Walter's graphic picture of it, "are trees—larch and spruce and ash and beech and sycamore—and the great hollow is strewn with leaves. The interlacing branches above breaking out into verdure, make a roof of twinkling emerald, but down in the hollow there is a shadowy gloom. In the gorge a thin stream glistens. It issues from the throat of a cavern of rocks, its shallow bed is half choked with rotting herbage and is crossed again and again by fallen and inclining trees. . . . Here and there a bare forehead of rock stands out and overlooks the gorge with nothing, perhaps, but a twisted root, like a swollen vein, protruding on its front."<sup>1</sup> This seems to have suggested many details in the scenery of *The Lover's Tale*, written when Tennyson was still at Somersby, and if Mr. Cuming Walter goes too far in attributing to it the genesis of *Maud*, there can be

<sup>1</sup> In *Tennyson Land*, pp. 78, 79.

little doubt that there are many reminiscences of it in that poem. Here, at all events, began Tennyson's familiarity with the "silent woody places" which, with their various phenomena, fill so wide a space in his Nature-paintings.

Though he said himself that if the scenery of *The Miller's Daughter* was suggested by any particular place it was the mill at Trumpington near Cambridge, it is difficult not to think that it must have owed many touches to the mill near his home, Stockworth Mill. As Mr. Cuming Walter has pointed out,

The white chalk-quarry from the hill  
Gleamed to the flying moon by fits,

seems plainly to refer to the white chalk-quarry at Thetford, which can be seen from Stockworth Mill. But the matter is a trifle.

It is not necessary to extend these illustrations of the effect of Lincolnshire scenery on Tennyson's poetry further, and we may now pass to Farringford, to which he removed from Twickenham at the end of 1853, and where in the following year he wrote *Maud*. His description of it, "close to the ridge of a noble down," and of the prospect in his *Invitation to Maurice* is well known :—

Groves of pine on either hand,  
To break the blast of winter, stand ;  
And further on, the hoary Channel  
Tumbles a billow on chalk and sand ;

Where, if below the milky steep  
 Some ship of battle slowly creep,  
 And on thro' zones of light and shadow  
 Glimmer away to the lonely deep.

Tennyson himself in some notes on *Maud* printed in the Biography by his son, says that "many of the descriptions of nature are taken from observations of natural phenomena at Farringford." No one, indeed, can take a walk along the Downs from Watcombe Bay by the Beacon towards the promontory over the Needles without recalling innumerable passages which were plainly suggested from what meets the view, and, we may add, strikes the ear ; such as :—

Listening now to the tide in its broad-flung shipwrecking roar,  
 Now to the scream of a madden'd beach dragg'd down by the wave,

which, however, seems to have been more immediately suggested by the breakers on the shore of Shole Bay,

or

Is that enchanted moan only the swell  
 Of the long waves that roll in yonder bay ?

or

When the far-off sail is blown by the breeze of a softer clime,  
 Half-lost in the liquid azure bloom of a crescent of sea.

This too, in *Sea Dreams*, as his son remarks, was a picture sketched from what he here saw :—

A full tide  
 Rose with ground-swell, which, on the foremost rocks  
 Touching, upjetted in spirts of wild sea-smoke,  
 And scaled in sheets of wasteful foam, and fell  
 In vast sea-cataracts—ever and anon  
 Dead claps of thunder from within the cliffs  
 Heard thro' the living roar.

In the Prologue to *The Charge of the Heavy Brigade* there is a description of an autumn scene from Aldworth :—

Our birches yellowing and from each  
 The light leaf falling fast,  
 While squirrels from our fiery beech  
 Were bearing off the mast.  
 You came, and look'd and loved the view  
 Long-known and loved by me,  
 Green Sussex fading into blue  
 With one gray glimpse of sea.

It may be well now to give a few illustrations of scenes and pictures suggested by other places.

From one of his own notes we learn that the beautiful picture which concludes *Audley Court* was drawn from what he saw when coming down the hill over Torquay :—

But ere the night we rose  
 And sauntered home beneath a moon, that, just  
 In crescent, dimly rain'd about the leaf  
 Twilights of airy silver, till we reach'd  
 The limit of the hills : and as we sank  
 From rock to rock upon the glooming quay,  
 The town was hush'd beneath us : lower down  
 The bay was oily calm : the harbour-buoy,  
 Sole star of phosphorescence in the calm,  
 With one green sparkle ever and anon  
 Dipt by itself ;

and the same scene suggested to him the line in *The Princess*,

A full sea glazed with muffled moonlight.

A fine tree in the Lac de Gaube, standing in midstream

between two cataracts, gave him the picture in *The Princess* :—

And standing like a stately Pine  
Set in a cataract on an island-crag,  
When storm is on the heights, and right and left  
Suck'd from the dark heart of the long hills roll  
The torrents dash'd to the vale.

Another fine Nature-sketch in the same poem was, he tells us, drawn from what he saw when ascending Snowdon :—

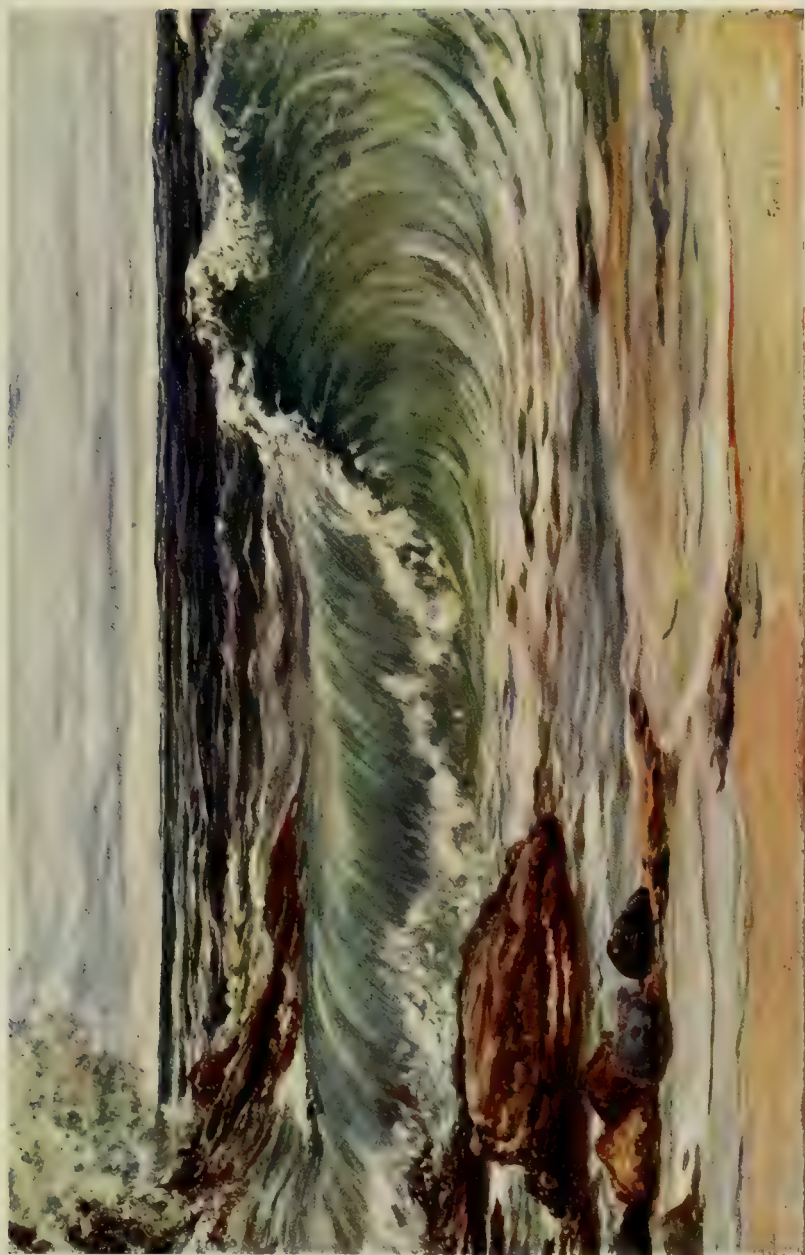
As one who climbs a peak to gaze  
O'er land and main, and sees a great black cloud  
Drag inward from the deeps, a wall of night  
Blot out the slope of sea from verge to shore,  
And suck the blending splendour from the sand,  
And, quenching lake by lake and tarn by tarn,  
Expunge the world.

This, it may be remarked, bears so close a resemblance to a passage in the *Iliad* (iv. 275), that had Tennyson not asserted that it was the result of his own observation, we should have taken it as an embroidered adaptation from Homer.

We learn, too, from his letter diary that another little sea-piece equally Homeric was the record of what he saw from the cabin door during a tour on the North Sea :—

Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,  
Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all  
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,  
Down on a bark, and overbears the bark  
And him that helms it.







Another fine Nature-simile in *Geraint and Enid* was suggested by what he saw and heard at Festiniog:—

For as one,  
That listens near a torrent mountain-brook,  
All thro' the crash of the near cataract hears  
The drumming thunder of the huger fall  
At distance.

This truth to nature vitalises and gives originality to what might have been a commonplace adaptation of part of the machinery of the ancient Greek and Roman epic poets and their modern imitators, the employment, that is to say, of these Nature cameos in the form of similes. It may be doubted whether Tennyson will have any successor to revive them.

One of his most finished and beautiful cameos is the ruin picture in *The Marriage of Geraint*:—

He look'd and saw that all was ruinous.  
Here stood a shatter'd archway plumed with fern;  
And here had fall'n a great part of a tower,  
Whole, like a crag that tumbles from a cliff,  
And like a crag was gay with wilding flowers:  
And high above a piece of turret stair  
Worn by the feet that now were silent, wound  
Bare to the sun, and monstrous ivy-stems  
Claspt the gray walls with hairy-fibred arms,  
And suck'd the joining of the stones, and look'd  
A knot, beneath, of snakes, aloft, a grove.

This was written, we are told, at Middleham Castle; whether it be a sketch of what that castle actually presents I cannot say; it might certainly—this I can say—have been transcribed from a portion of the ruins of Conway Castle. In this description we may pause to

notice we have an illustration of Tennyson's scrupulous exactness in detail, an exactness which extends to his treatment of all natural objects, however insignificant.

Thus of flowers :

The foxglove clusters dappled bells.

More crumpled than a poppy from the sheath.

Thus of the sunflower :

Rays round with flames its disk of seed

Thus of the dog-rose :

Tufts of rosy-tinted snow.

Again :

Pure as lines of green that streak the white  
Of the first snowdrop's inner leaves.

Wan-sallow as the plant that feeds itself  
Root-bitten by white lichen.

In gloss and hue the chestnut when the shell  
Divides three-fold to show the fruit within.

So of trees :

When rosy plumelets tuft the larch.

Delays, as the tender ash delays,  
To clothe herself when all the woods are green.

A million emeralds break from the ruby-budded lime.

Like a purple beech among the greens  
Looks out of place.

That beech will gather brown,  
This maple burn itself away.

Or of curious vegetable anomalies :

A stump of oak half-dead,  
From roots like some black coil of carven snakes,  
Clutch'd at the crag, and started thro' mid-air  
Bearing an eagle's nest.

So of insects :

And flash'd as those  
Dull-coated things, that making slide apart  
Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns  
A jewell'd harness, ere they pass and fly.

And wheel'd or lit the filmy shapes  
That haunt the dusk, with ermine capes  
And woolly breasts and beaded eyes.

So of fish :

Like a shoal of darting fish that on a summer morn  
Come slipping o'er their shadows on the sand.

The minnows everywhere  
In crystal eddies glance and poise.

Of agates :

As bottom agates seem to wave and float  
In crystal currents of clear morning seas.

The same studiously alert observation led him to  
note the various effects produced by distance, move-  
ment, or light or shade on natural objects. So of the  
sea from an immense height :

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls.

Of a waterfall at a distance :

And like a downward smoke the slender stream  
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.

Or of water falling high up a mountain :

Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke.

Or of the effect of the sun on bracken as the eye at sunset runs along the level of the fern :

It seemed to Pelleas that the fern without  
Burnt as a living fire of emeralds.

*Pelleas and Ettarre.*

Or of a procession passing under leafy shade when the sun is shining :

And over them the tremulous isles of light  
Slided, they moving under shade.

*Princess, vi.*

But it is not necessary to multiply these. Tennyson's range and power as a Nature-painter would perhaps be best illustrated comprehensively by placing together what are perhaps his two most elaborate pictures, each far removed in character from the other. Let us begin with the charming scene in *The Gardener's Daughter* :—

Not wholly in the busy world, nor quite  
Beyond it, blooms the garden that I love.  
News from the humming city comes to it  
In sound of funeral or of marriage bells ;  
And, sitting muffled in dark leaves, you hear  
The windy clanging of the minster clock ;  
Although between it and the garden lies  
A league of grass, wash'd by a slow broad stream,  
That, stirr'd with languid pulses of the oar,  
Waves all its lazy lilies, and creeps on,  
Barge-laden, to three arches of a bridge  
Crown'd with the minster towers.

The fields between  
Are dewy-fresh, browsed by deep-udder'd kine,  
And all about the large lime feathers low,  
The lime a summer home of murmurous wings.



Compare with this the tropical scene in *Enoch Arden* :—

The mountain wooded to the peak, the lawns  
And winding glades high up like ways to Heaven,  
The slender coco's drooping crown of plumes,  
The lightning flash of insect and of bird,  
The lustre of the long convolvuluses  
That coil'd around the stately stems, and ran  
Ev'n to the limit of the land, the glows  
And glories of the broad belt of the world,  
All these he saw ; but what he fain had seen  
He could not see, the kindly human face,  
Nor ever hear a kindly voice, but heard  
The myriad shriek of wheeling ocean-fowl,  
The league-long roller thundering on the reef,  
The moving whisper of huge trees that branch'd  
And blossom'd in the zenith, or the sweep  
Of some precipitous rivulet to the wave,  
As down the shore he ranged, or all day long  
Sat often in the seaward-gazing gorge,  
A shipwreck'd sailor waiting for a sail :  
No sail from day to day, but every day  
The sunrise broken into scarlet shafts  
Among the palms and ferns and precipices ;  
The blaze upon the waters to the east ;  
The blaze upon his island overhead ;  
The blaze upon the waters to the west ;  
Then the great stars that globed themselves in Heaven,  
The hollow-bellowing ocean, and again  
The scarlet shafts of sunrise—but no sail.

We may fairly doubt whether in descriptive poetry this was ever equalled. It is obviously laboured in each detail, and yet nothing is in singularity, there is not a touch in it which does not exact, and exact importunately, its separate tribute of admiration, and

yet each blends harmoniously in contributing to the effect of the whole.

Some of his most magical effects are produced by the simplest means ; we may instance :—

When summer's hourly-mellowing change  
 May breathe, with many roses sweet,  
 Upon the thousand waves of wheat,  
 That ripple round the lonely grange.

*In Memoriam, xci.*

Or

Move eastward, happy earth, and leave  
 Yon orange sunset waning slow :  
 From fringes of the faded eve,  
 O, happy planet, eastward go ;  
 Till over thy dark shoulder glow  
 Thy silver sister-world.

*Fragment.*

Or

There all in spaces rosy-bright,  
 Large Hesper glitter'd on her tears,  
 And deepening thro' the silent spheres  
 Heaven over Heaven rose the night.

*Mariana in the South.*

The ninety-fifth section of *In Memoriam* is not merely among the gems, but among the miracles of description.

A striking characteristic of his descriptive poetry is that it is never diffuse and never commonplace. He seizes at once what is distinctive and essentially significant, catches and fixes it ; his very epithets are pictures. The "dewy tassell'd wood," "the crimson-circled star," "lean-headed eagles," "dry-tongu'd laurels," the "tender-pencill'd shadows," "ruby-budded limes," "sallow-rifted

glooms," "wide-wing'd sunset," "the beard-blown goat," and the like. But nothing contributes so much to the effect of his description as his use of onomatopœia, or the art of making the sound echo the sense, of which he is the greatest master in our language since Milton. A few examples must suffice :—

The wavy swell of the souging reeds.

The sweep of scythe in morning dew.

The league-long roller thundering on the reef.

The blasts that blow the poplar white,  
And lash with storm the streaming pane.

ghastly through the drizzling rain  
On the bald street breaks the blank day.

And followed up by a hundred airy does,  
Steps with a tender foot, light as on air,  
The lovely, lordly creature floated on.

Or let us take a whole passage, as, for example, the "Idyl" in *The Princess* :—

Nor cares to walk  
With Death and Morning on the silver horns,  
Nor wilt thou snare him in the white ravine,  
Nor find him dropt upon the firths of ice,  
That huddling slant in furrow-cloven falls  
To roll the torrent out of dusky doors :  
But follow ; let the torrent dance thee down  
To find him in the valley ; let the wild  
Lean-headed Eagles yelp alone, and leave  
The monstrous ledges there to slope, and spill  
Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke,  
That like a broken purpose waste in air.

Myriads of rivulets hurrying thro' the lawn,  
 The moan of doves in immemorial elms,  
 And murmuring of innumerable bees.

Equally wonderful is the passage already quoted from *Enoch Arden*.

Nor must we take our leave of him without noticing another characteristic of his descriptive poetry, namely, its elaborate symbolism. In *Maud* and in *In Memoriam* particularly he makes these descriptions reflect symbolically the mood or psychological state of the person who is supposed to be speaking. The most striking example of this is in *Enoch Arden*, where a description of a late autumn day, while exactly and vividly true to nature, as exactly and vividly typifies Enoch's position :—

Bright was that afternoon,  
 Sunny but chill ; till drawn thro' either chasm,  
 Where either haven open'd on the deeps,  
 Roll'd a sea-haze and whelm'd the world in gray ;  
 Cut off the length of highway on before,  
 And left but narrow breadth to left and right  
 Of wither'd holt or tilth or pasturage.  
 On the nigh-naked tree the robin piped  
 Disconsolate, and thro' the dripping haze  
 The dead weight of the dead leaf bore it down :  
 Last, as it seemed, a great mist-blotted light  
 Flared on him, and he came upon the place.

It is so with the opening lines, in which we have symbolically the key to the tragedy :—

Long lines of cliff breaking have left a chasm ;  
 And in the chasm are foam and yellow sands.

It is with the scene of Arthur's last battle :—







A land of old upheaven from the abyss  
By fire, to sink into the abyss again ;  
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,  
And the long mountains ended in a coast  
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away  
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.

In descriptive poetry in its relation to Nature-painting, it may safely be said that from nearly every point of view Tennyson is our greatest artist, and as long as the world he paints, or at least as long as our language lasts, he is never likely to lose his charm or, perhaps, his supremacy.

## CHAUCER AT ELTHAM

THERE is no more difficult historical task than to realise what a place or district looked like at a given period. In London and its neighbourhood change goes on unchangeably. In distant places, the Backwoods of Canada or the Australian Bush, for example, we feel that practically, except for sudden earthquakes or the slow growth of giant conifers, what the forest looked like five centuries ago, that it probably looked like last week, and we have to think of some more remote epoch, before Niagara was turned over the cliff, or while great lakes irrigated the deserts. Is it impossible to reconstruct a view of the lower Thames as it was in the fourteenth century, when Chaucer sent his pilgrims—each primed with his story—to ride through the Garden of England from the Tabard to Harbledown? Of all the places through which they passed, of all the buildings they can have seen, is there one of which we can say with certainty, “Here is a scene which unquestionably was familiar to Geoffrey Chaucer”?

The pilgrims set out from Southwark. London Bridge brought them there. Old London Bridge is

gone nearly a hundred years. It brought them into High Street, and there must have been some gate or bar marking where Southwark, the fortification protecting London Bridge, ended, pointing out the boundary of the City Ward. Mr. Norman, and before him Mr. Rendle, have written about old Southwark and its people, but they tell us about no such landmark. The Tabard was not, strictly speaking, in Southwark but in St. George's. The pilgrims may have seen what is now the Cathedral, but the parish church of the Tabard was St. George's. There is a church of that dedication close by, as there was in Chaucer's time, but the present church, old as it is, has been rebuilt over and over again, the last time in 1733, nearly two hundred years ago. It is the same with the Tabard. Mr. Rendle calls it also the Circot, Syrcote, or, as we should say, Surcoat, and it was for a century or two the Talbot. The building is changed as well as the name, and we may search in vain for anything Chaucer can have seen. For years, too, all this district was connected in our minds with the old Marshalsea, the King's Bench, and the gaol at the end of Horsemonger Lane, where criminals, or at least the victims of our sanguinary penal code, were put to death every month.

There is nothing, except the names, to tempt a poet to linger in the suburbs of Southwark. A modern breathing-space for school-children has been called Little Dorrit's Playground, but the nearest thing to a poetical memory will be found in the grave of Nahum

Tate, joint-author with Brady of the metrical version of the Psalms.

It is much the same with the neighbourhood as we see it now ; and it can have been, at best, only suburban in the days of Chaucer. The Old Kent Road is most interesting historically, but this side of its character may best be studied, perhaps, on a large scale map. Whether, as some think, probably with reason, it is an ancient British trackway and part of a system which would connect it perhaps with Stonehenge, or whether it was made, for strategical reasons, by the Romans, may be a question. There can be no question as to its intense dulness until at least we are well out of town. We strike what is still the country at Greenwich, the park of which is artificially rural, but it is not till we cross the hills on which Greenwich Observatory is placed, and find ourselves looking to the south rather than to the north, into Kent rather than across the Thames, that we feel the open fields and woods are at length within reach. Here the Old Dover Road rises, until at Shooters' Hill it is some four hundred feet above the sea, and falls again rapidly towards the south, with woods in abundance, and some signs at least of a state of things which may have extended much more widely in the days of the Canterbury Pilgrims, but marking the difference, to the modern seeker, rather as one of degree than of kind.

Here, then, we come upon something tangibly of Chaucer's time, namely, the Palace of Eltham. If we

try to form a clear idea of Eltham in Chaucer's lifetime, the materials are abundant. The place was especially favoured by those of our kings whose names are most often mentioned in histories of the so-called Wars of the Roses. We have Froissart's account of his sojourn here, under Richard II. ; and there is no king whose costume and the costume of whose time are so well known to us by contemporary pictures in illuminated manuscripts. The famous Bedford Missal, which, by the way, is not a missal at all but a Book of Hours, was written in this reign, as well as the very curious account of the doings of Richard in Ireland and his abdication in a book, now in the British Museum, which has been copied in our time in a volume (xx.) of *Archæologia*. In addition there are many illustrated copies of Froissart's *Chronicles*, from some of which Mr. Newbolt obtained the pictures in his admirable *Froissart in Britain*, published in 1900. Art was at a high level in those days, just before the Hundred Years' War swept everything away, architecture, poetry, painting, and even history itself, for we know less from contemporary chroniclers of the reigns of Edward IV. and Richard III. than we do of Edward III. or Richard II. It is useless to speculate as to what, for example, fourteenth-century architecture might have grown into if the builders of the next age had not been forced to turn their attention and use their unrivalled building materials on fortification. Castles, especially in ruin, are very picturesque now ; but if the men who built



Salisbury Cathedral or Westminster Hall had not been obliged to crenellate and machicolate, to reckon with gunpowder and cannon-balls, what might they not have done ?

This palace of Eltham, on the green southern slopes, among the ancient oaks, with its golden spires, each catching the sunshine with a different heraldic device, must have excited the admiration of a poetical mind. To his gorgeous visions, beautiful as this appeared, something far more beautiful seemed possible. That, almost from the day of Chaucer's death, for a whole century, Englishmen should be chiefly engaged in cutting off each other's heads, that all the arts should be at a standstill, that no more songs should be sung, that the only thing which flourished would be superstition, and the only people who prospered would be the monks and friars and mass priests, though even ecclesiastical architecture had become nothing but ornament,—that this should be the fate of the land he loved so well can scarcely have entered his mind. It is, however, in the history of the arts of peace that we can best judge of the effect of the Hundred Years' War in England. When it began, an event which we may date with the death of Richard II., the English artists were the best in Europe, only those parts of France and Flanders which were most exposed to our influence being able to build or to write or to paint like Englishmen. When the fighting ceased, with the success of a usurper in no way entitled to the prize for which all



this blood and all these tears had been poured out, architecture had to make a fresh beginning, painting had ceased, if there was any music we know not of it, poetry and history had disappeared, and from her supremacy in all such things England had humbly to learn, even from Italy, which had been the most backward when the War of the Roses began. Our painters came from Germany and Switzerland, our sculptors from Tuscany, our architects from Holland, and the fashion of looking to foreigners set in and can hardly be said to have yet ceased. Between Chaucer in the fourteenth century and the Elizabethans in the seventeenth our literary and poetical history is a blank. Cranmer, although he seldom secures the credit which is his due, restored us our prose, and, so far as we know, invented our music, but there is no one else. The supremacy of England was gone, as it appeared, for ever till Shakespeare recalled it.

There is something poetical in the name of Eltham, "Alteham," as it is called in Domesday Book. All nations have their Altehams, their old homes. To the Arab dweller by the arid shores of the Red Sea there was one place sacred, before Mecca had been heard of, and this was the Old Man's Home; the star which rose over it, in the most distant regions, in Spain or on the African coast of the Atlantic, "Beyt al Agoos," reminded him whence he came out. The English sailor names it unwittingly as Betelgeuse when he makes his calculations; but why this pleasant village,

this regal residence in southern England should have been so named by some Anglo-Saxon soldier, thinking perhaps that it resembled the village by the Elbe or the Rhine where dwelt "the old folks at home," we may never know now. Certain it is that when it is first described for us, it was already a pleasant place. Even the latest editors of the history of Kent add a footnote to express this feeling: "We may be sure that the beautiful country beyond, with undulating woodland or forest, abounding in game, and combining the pleasures of the chase with the advantages of proximity to the capital and easy access by river or land, was even more attractive to our Norman forefathers than now, when, shorn of its pristine beauties, it still lures the opulent merchant to a pleasant retreat from the turmoil of the city."

Since those words were written, Eltham has passed through various vicissitudes. For a time the only remains of the palace of Richard II. were threatened with removal. They were, it was said, to be transported to Windsor, where Wyatville was engaged in making a stately castle out of another ruin. Better counsels prevailed; yet in our own day the barn within the moat seemed likely to perish, first, for want of a little care, and afterwards when it was proposed to "restore" it. The "restoration," so called, of old churches and cathedrals was in full swing in those days. Few escaped, and Eltham only because nobody wanted it. Now, at last, the County Council is said

to have taken charge, and it is, at least as regards the roof, weather-tight. It is certainly a pleasant place to visit, a place where we may try to reconstruct the whole palace as it was when Chaucer had charge of it, and when Froissart brought his poems to Richard II.

In Mr. Newbolt's *Froissart in Britain* we have both a passage from Lord Berners' translation of the Chronicle and also a view showing three or four knights and gentlemen riding from Leeds to Eltham. It will be remembered that this was Leeds Castle near Maidstone in Kent, so called from its being situated on a "leed" or expansion of the stream of the little Holingbourne or Hollingbourne, a brook which, like the Holebourne in London, made its previous way in deeply cut channels and high banks. Leaving Leeds and its islands, the travellers rode among the meadows and orchards till, after a pleasant journey of some five-and-twenty miles, they came in sight of the towers and spires of Eltham crowning a wooded slope. "When they had tarried at Leeds a four days," we are told, "the King returned to Rochester and so to Eltham; and so I rode forth in the King's company." It was on this occasion that Froissart tells of "walking up and down in a gallery before the King's chamber," and adds that the galleries at Eltham were "right pleasant and shady, for those galleries were covered with vines." He also tells us of the hall. The Duke of Gloucester, we read, "quitted the King's chamber, followed by the Earl of Derby, and entered the hall, where he ordered

a table to be spread, and they both sat down to dinner." A scene is described by Froissart at Eltham, which is probably very like what must have occurred to Chaucer both with Richard and, after his deposition, with Henry IV.; for Chaucer must have been here frequently, not only when the Court was in residence, but also at other times when he had charge as surveyor or clerk of the works at Greenwich and Eltham among other places. Froissart informs us of his own doings:—

Then the King desired to see my book that I had brought for him; so he saw it in his chamber, for I had laid it there ready on his bed. When the King opened it, it pleased him well, for it was fair illumined and written, and covered with crimson velvet, with ten buttons of silver and gilt and roses of gold in the midst, with two great clasps gilt, richly wrought. Then the King demanded of me whereof it treated, and I showed him how it treated of matters of love; whereof the King was glad, and looked in it and read in many places, for he could speak and read French very well. And he caused it to be taken by a knight of his chamber, named Sir Richard Credon, to bear it into his secret chamber.

Froissart relates other reminiscences of Eltham at this time, namely, the year 1395. He tarried in the King of England's Court as long as it pleased him, not always in one place, for the King oftentimes removed to Eltham, to Leeds, to Kingston, to Sheen, to Chertsey, or to Windsor, all in the neighbourhood of London, and almost all in Chaucer's charge. It was at Eltham, in 1387, that Richard had received the deputation of

London citizens who complained of the prevalence of a rumour that the King was about to deliver Calais into the hands of the French. "The King tarried at Eltham, right pensive and full of displeasure by reason of the words that he had heard."

Chaucer, who was a Kentish Justice of the Peace, had been M.P. for Kent from 1386, and had much to do with various works along the shores of the Thames, where are now the great docks and embankments of Woolwich and Tilbury and other places well known. In the fourteenth century they were open country, and the frequent Thames floods rendered constant care needful. At Eltham his care seems to have been chiefly for the gardens, and the terraces and shady walks which so pleased the French chronicler were probably his special work. There are still extant the accounts rendered from time to time, and one can only wonder how the poet was able for all he had to do, or how he contrived to obtain leisure for all he wrote. One has, too, a feeling of grudging that his mind should have been occupied with such accounts as some of those still preserved in the Public Record Office. They have been printed by the Chaucer Society. The particulars in July 1389 are very full, and tell us of his charge of the park as well as of the house, and the works being carried on are described with some minuteness. The storehouses, the orchards and the terraces are mentioned. The mill was a very important item among the out-buildings, but the gardens were apparently the chief



object of Chaucer's care. The inventories are full of homely words forced into a kind of Latin, and comprise such articles as a bowl for mortar, a pipe, that is a large open barrel, *pro aqua intus carienda*—for carrying water within,—a tap, scaffold legs, and “a crowe ferri” —an iron crowbar.

We are not surprised, then, to find frequent references in the poems to gardens and garden affairs. A long list can be made of trees such as must have been seen in the parks which were under Chaucer's charge. Hedges were already everywhere common, and fruit-trees were rapidly multiplied—so that, to judge from his writings alone, cherries, figs, peaches, pears, and raspberries were flourishing in England as well as apples and grapes. Gardens were formal and were enclosed with walls, divided by ornamental hedges and varied by terraces and grassy walks. The box had come in as well as yews for flower-beds, while roses and many other flowers were cultivated for their beauty or their perfume. In the *Romaunt of the Rose* he concludes:—

There is no place in Paradise  
So good in for to dwell or be,  
As in that garden, thoughte me ;  
For there was many a bird singing.

He goes on to speak particularly of the nightingale and of flocks of turtles and of laverocks and “terins and mavies,” siskins, that is, and song thrushes. There is much more of the same kind in this poem ; but there are also references to a period probably nearer that in



which he had the superintendence of the royal enclosures round Eltham. Thus the opening lines of the *Canterbury Tales* speak of the sweet breath of the zephyr inspiring every coppice and heath, “the tendre croppes and the yonge sonne,”

The small fowls make melody  
That sleep all night with open eye.

Passages are numerous and no modern Chaucerian scholar has failed to notice the frequency of the allusions to the care and improvement of parks and pleasaunces, wildernesses and walled gardens. No doubt, in Windsor Castle and the riverside palace of Greenwich, Chaucer may have found the objects of his greatest admiration as well as at Eltham; but to our eyes Eltham alone allows us at the present day with least difficulty to see the remains of a country house of the first quality as it was in his day, and to judge a little of the picturesque surroundings, the trees and the fountains, in which he seems to have personally rejoiced :—

Certayn I am ful lyk, indeed,  
To him that cast in erthe his seed ;  
And hath joie of the newe spring  
Whan it greneth in the ginning  
And is also fair and fresh of flour,  
Lusty to seen, swete of odour.

In the *Marchante's Tale* he speaks of the original author of the *Romaunt of the Rose*. He was one, among others of his “honest things,” who

Made a gardin walled al with stoon :  
So fair a gardin woot I nowhere noon,  
For out of doute, I verrailly suppose  
That he that wroot the Romance of the Rose  
Ne could of it the beautee wel devyse ;  
Ne Priapus ne mighte nat suffyse,  
Though he be god of gardins, for to telle  
The beautee of the gardin and the welle,  
That stood under a laurer, alway grene.

It is to Eltham, then, rather than to any of the other royal residences that we look to tell us something of Chaucer and his poetry. The alterations have been many and great. Few traces remain of the times of Richard II. or of Henry IV., but enough, with an old ground-plan reproduced in Streatfeild and Larking's *Hasted*, and with the description made after the death of Charles I., to tell us that in addition to the moat and its three-arched Gothic bridge and the ruined hall, with its oaken beams and its grand bay windows, the buildings of the palace were of considerable extent. We turn out of the street of the suburban town, which in the fourteenth century must have consisted of little except the church and its surroundings. Some old buildings on the right, in a kind of avenue, catch the eye. They obviously date from the early Stuart period. Here was the lower court of the palace, a very ancient red-brick wall bounding the view on the opposite side. In this lower court were the out-buildings, and it seems likely that, as recommended by the Commission of the Commonwealth Government, some of the old building materials were used to make separate "habitations worth

£25 a year." We now approach the moat, where a picturesque bridge, consisting, as already mentioned, of three pointed arches, leads into the upper court of the palace.

This upper court is thus described: It consisted of one fair chapel, one great hall, 36 rooms and offices below stairs, with two large cellars; and above stairs, in lodgings called the King's side, 17; the Queen's side, 12; and the Prince's side, 9; in all 38 lodging-rooms. There was no furniture, but the hall and chapel were wainscoted. This inner court covered half an acre, including a garden on the southern side called "the Arbour." The lower court, the avenue, namely, through which we now approach the bridge, was bounded on the eastern side by the brick wall mentioned above, behind which lay the orchard, and the offices and out-houses consisted of "35 bays of buildings" extending round all the three sides, and including a gate on the north side leading into the village of Eltham.

The adjacent parks, in Chaucer's time, must have been full of deer, and the timber felled in 1649 amounted to upwards of two hundred tons, which was sent to Deptford, for use in the dockyard. The Great Park had been estimated in the reign of James I. as containing 612 acres, 1 rood, and 10 poles, and adjoined the Old or Middle Park of 308 acres, and the New or Horne Park of 345. The Middle Park attained a certain celebrity of late years when Blenkiron had here a racing stud; and there is still, in spite of the great

increase in the number of villas and of all kinds of houses in the parish, a large extent of open land, while the views, especially to southward into Kent, are full of beautiful scenery, such as may well have inspired the poet.

Chaucer's connection with Eltham ceased during the troubles which overtook Richard II. For some time he seems to have been without any employment under the Crown, and it has been supposed that his enforced leisure may have been spent in the elaboration and completion of the *Canterbury Tales*. Better times were apparently in store when Henry IV., the son of his old master and patron, John of Gaunt, succeeded as king, and in 1399 we find him taking out a lease of "The Rose," a house which stood to the east of the Lady Chapel of Westminster Abbey. The site is now covered by Henry the Seventh's Chapel, and the lease is preserved in the Muniment Room of the Dean and Chapter. Here he died, according to a tradition which may be accepted, on the 25th October 1400, when he cannot have been much over sixty years of age. He was buried in the south transept, in the eastern aisle, the first of a long list of men whose graves or whose monuments have conferred on this spot the name of "The Poets' Corner." During the reign of Queen Mary, in 1555, Chaucer's body was removed to a more sumptuous tomb close by, and in 1599 the grave of Edmund Spenser was made near it.

## OLIVER GOLDSMITH AT HYDE HOUSE FARM

No suburb of London has changed more during the past century than that which lies to the north-west. Five miles from Tyburn Turnpike—where the Marble Arch stands at the present day—the explorer of a hundred years ago found himself as much in the country to all seeming as if he was in Wiltshire. The road, as some people of an antiquarian turn were beginning to find out, was among the oldest in Britain—nay, there were those who said it was there before the coming of the Romans. It led through a pleasant undulating country, well wooded for the most part, with higher hills rising on either hand. Here and there stood a farmhouse, here and there a stately manor-house. Edgware lay beyond, on a sunny upward slope, and woods bounded the view toward the north. The name probably denoted a worth, or clere, or opening in a forest, for here were the remains of the Middlesex Forest, and this was the edge of the hill over which the road, called the Watling Street by the Middle Saxons, pursued its journey towards Chester. In the days



which we would like to realise just now, the days when George III. had been some fourteen years on the throne, the Edgware Road from the north-eastern corner of Hyde Park to the village of Edgware, a stretch of some six or seven miles, was completely rustic. A few houses were at the Paddington cross-roads near Lisson, where the Grove marked the site of an old manor-house, Lilestone, now occupied by the buildings of Queen Charlotte's Hospital. Farther north, on the right, rose Hampstead, with a church near the summit, and when we proceeded a short way farther, two or three waste tracts, the common of Marylebone, the Heath of Hampstead, the Kenwood of Highgate, lay on the right toward the distant city. Immediately on the left was Willesden, with its old church, and another great piece of once forest land, Wormwood Scrubs. It was to this region that Oliver Goldsmith retired to spend what turned out to be the last summer of his life—a region within easy reach of the scenes and the people he loved best, yet, for purposes of literary work, secluded and undisturbed.

It would be interesting if among some old bundle of family correspondence, perhaps, we should come upon a letter describing a visit to Dr. Goldsmith. That something of the kind may well have existed—may exist still—is evident from a short passage in Boswell's *Johnson*, where, under Friday, April 10, 1772, he tells us of meeting Goldsmith at dinner at General Oglethorpe's, Johnson being also present. Goldsmith told







the party of his being busy with his *Natural History*, and, "that he might have full leisure for it, he had taken lodgings at a farmer's house, near to the six mile stone, on the Edgware Road." It seems that he and a pamphleteer, also from Ireland, called Bott, had gone in 1771 to what in one book is called "High House Farm," but probably more correctly "Hyde House Farm," now a villa. Sir Leslie Stephen calls it "a farm near Hyde," but there is no place named simply Hyde in that neighbourhood. "The Hyde" is the name of a hamlet, partly in the parish of Hendon, but chiefly in that of Kingsbury, and in the eighteenth century consisted probably of little more than this farm, which belonged to All Souls' College, Oxford, which also owns the adjacent manor of Kingsbury. Walford, though his data are questionable, gives the most circumstantial account of the place, and a wood-cut, in his *Greater London* (i. 276). The farm lies on the left, presumably the north, side of Kingsbury Lane, between Kingsbury Green and the sixth milestone on the high road from London to Edgware. "The house," he continues, "is said to be between 200 and 300 years old, and is of brick, and of two floors. The front portion of the building, with the exception of some of the windows having been renewed and that the heavy beams of the ceiling have given place to flat stucco work, remains in much the same condition as when it was occupied by Goldsmith more than a century ago." This was written, or at least published,

about 1890. Walford adds: "The rooms at the back, however, were rebuilt only a few years ago, at which time a small chamber, which had been used by Goldsmith as his study, was unfortunately demolished. This room, we understand, contained a small cupboard, which might have been used as a bookcase, and bore unmistakable signs of having been occupied by the author of *Animated Nature*."

All this, with its "between 200 and 300 years" and its "a few years ago" and the "cupboard" with its "unmistakable signs" is sufficiently tantalising. We return to Boswell with pleasure. He continues, still under the same entry in April 1772, to tell us about Goldsmith at "the six mile stone." He carried down his books "in two returned post-chaises. He said he believed the farmer's family thought him an odd character, similar to that in which the *Spectator* appeared to his landlady and her children: he was 'The Gentleman.'"

In the same paragraph, before concluding his account of the conversation at General Oglethorpe's table on that Friday in April, Boswell adds: "Mr. Mickle, the translator of *The Lusiad*, and I went to visit him at this place a few days afterwards. He was not at home; but, having a curiosity to see his apartment, we went in, and found curious scraps of descriptions of animals scrawled upon the wall with a black lead pencil." Here, unfortunately, Boswell leaves off. It may not, perhaps, be going too far to gather the

drift of his observations as to Goldsmith's zoological notes from a passage in the *Johnson*, under the year 1776. Here, speaking of the epitaph in Westminster Abbey, he mentions Johnson's opinion that Goldsmith hardly knew a horse from a cow. Boswell adds his own views on the subject: "Bouffon tells us that the cow sheds her horns every two years—a most palpable error, which Goldsmith faithfully transferred into his book." It is wonderful that Bouffon, who lived so much in the country, at his noble seat, should have fallen into such a blunder. That Goldsmith, who, whatever his knowledge, was not without observation, could have followed the Frenchman in this particular instance, where a moment's thought would have corrected the error, only shows how needful quiet was to the peculiar bent of his genius. At The Hyde he is believed to have composed many better pieces of work than his *Animated Nature*. Moreover, he was born and passed his early years in an agricultural country, where cattle and green crops abounded. Born at Forgney, or Pallas, near Ballymahon, in the county of Longford, in 1728, he did not proceed to Dublin before 1744. Afterwards, until 1752, he led, according to his biographers, "an unsettled life" in Ireland. The country—and The Hyde, though but six miles from London, was completely in the country even ten years ago—must have been full of the sights and sounds of his youth. *The Deserted Village* appeared in 1770, and must have been written while he was searching



for such a retreat as this at The Hyde. We do not know, in fact, for certain when it was that he settled permanently at that particular farm. Similar farms existed in plenty, at Enfield, for instance, or at Edmonton, where Charles Lamb much later found a retreat, or till our own day, not seven miles off, at Hayes or Bedfont.

By 1764 he had gone much farther afield. Mr. Austin Dobson has fully described his visit to Bath, about 1760. *The Vicar of Wakefield* is always said to have been suggested by a visit to Yorkshire in that year. In truth, though Goldsmith can hardly be described as a well-educated man, he had a power of assimilation which Johnson exactly denoted by the line in his epitaph—a line often assigned erroneously to some classical original—in which he asserted that Goldsmith touched nothing that he did not adorn:—

Qui nullum fere scribendi genus non tetigit, nullum quod tetigit non ornavit.

In the letters entitled *The Citizen of the World* he constantly describes excursions into the country immediately round London. His account, for example, of Kentish Town and “Pangrace” is in the highest style of burlesque: “Islington is a pretty neat town mostly built of brick, with a church and bells; it has a small lake, or rather pond, in the midst. . . . After having surveyed the curiosities of this fair and beautiful town, I proceeded forward, leaving a fair stone building,



called the White Conduit House, on my right," and so on. His derivation of the name of Kentish Town is an admirable parody of the guesswork indulged in by most of the London topographers of his day: "This pretty town probably borrowed its name from its vicinity to the county of Kent; and indeed it is not unnatural that it should, as there are only London and the adjacent villages that lie between them." So, too, he mocks at some of the travellers of his day: "I could have wished, indeed, to satisfy my curiosity without going thither, but that was impracticable, and therefore I resolved to go."

As to the methods of locomotion in the neighbourhood of London, he tells us of two. Travellers either take coach, which costs ninepence, or they may go afoot, which costs nothing: "In my opinion, a coach is by far the most eligible convenience, but I was resolved to go on foot, having considered with myself that going in that manner would be the cheapest way."

There are many allusions in these delightful Chinese letters to the excursions he habitually made into villages near London. In one he goes to see an election, and, there is no doubt, on that occasion he clearly distinguished, at any rate, between a cow and a dog. He is asked awkward questions, and "I know not," he reports, "what might have been the consequences of my reserve, had not the attention of the mob been called off to a skirmish between a brandy-drinker's cow and a gin-drinker's mastiff, which turned out,

greatly to the satisfaction of the mob, in favour of the mastiff."

Perhaps there is an echo of the days at The Hyde, or some other village retreat, in one of these letters, which begins: "It is no unpleasing contemplation to consider the influence which soil and climate have upon the disposition of the inhabitants, the animals, and vegetables of different countries." This influence he remarks especially in England. "The same hidden cause which gives courage to their dogs and cocks gives also fierceness to their men." It is, of course, the inhabitants of towns who notice most the aspect of the country, the principal reason probably being that the country is visited in fine weather, or at least in summer, for rest and amusement, and there can be little doubt that those who have passed their youth in the country enjoy the country sights and sounds the most.

Goldsmith, notwithstanding his vaccine ignorance, was thoroughly imbued with the not altogether imaginary happiness of country life. His farmhouse retreat is minutely described in lines, the very first word of which indicates his pleasure in the rural landscape he depicts. "Sweet," he says—

Sweet was the sound, when oft at evening's close  
Up yonder hill the village murmur rose ;  
There, as I passed with careless steps and slow,  
The mingling notes came softened from below ;  
The swain responsive as the milkmaid sung,  
The sober herd that lowed to meet their young ;





The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool,  
The playful children just let loose from school;  
The watch-dog's voice that bayed the whispering wind,  
And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind;  
These all in sweet confusion sought the shade,  
And filled each pause the nightingale had made.

This is often quoted as the description of an Irish village. There is not an Irish touch or allusion in it. The last line—one of the best—is fatal to any such idea. “In Ireland,” says Mr. Alfred Newton, in his *Dictionary of Birds*, speaking of the geographical distribution of the nightingale, “there is no pretence, even, of its appearance.” The whole passage fits a Middlesex village, or rather hamlet, exactly. The ale-house is not Irish, and all through a thousand allusions, more or less precise, show whence came the immediate inspiration of the poem.

It is the same in *The Traveller* :—

Ye glittering towns, with wealth and splendour crowned;  
Ye fields, where summer spreads profusion round;  
Ye lakes, whose vessels catch the busy gale;  
Ye bending swains, that dress the flowery vale;  
For me your tributary stores combine:  
Creation's heir, the world, the world is mine!

This breathes of London and its suburbs, and of nowhere else. Just as much do we seem to see “Hyde Farm at the six mile stone,” in the famous passage of the same poem where his genius spreads her wing :—

And flies where Britain courts the western spring;  
Where lawns extend that scorn Arcadian pride,  
And brighter streams than famed Hydaspes glide;



There all around the gentlest breezes stray,  
There gentle music melts on every spray ;  
Creation's mildest charms are there combined.

A visit to Goldsmith in his Edgware Road retreat might well have been described by his contemporary, the other literary physician, Smollett. There are many passages in *Humphrey Clinker*, for instance, which answer well to 'The Hyde. We cannot, in all the changes of modern civilised suburban existence, realise what it meant a hundred and forty years ago to live at a farm, even so near London. Here is a specimen from Smollett :—

The house is old-fashioned and irregular, but lodgeable and commodious. To the south it has the river in front . . . and on the north there is a rising ground, covered with an agreeable plantation ; the greens and walks are kept in the nicest order, and all is rural and romantic.

Delightful as Goldsmith seems to have found his country workshop, he left it and went into London when what proved to be his last illness attacked him. A man who had travelled so much, and among so many unwholesome places, can hardly at forty-six have contracted what we now describe as typhoid fever. But he undoubtedly had feverish symptoms, and, as is proverbially the case with men of some medical knowledge, he mistook his own complaint, and insisted, contrary to advice, on using medicines which only aggravated his disorder. We read of mental distress, of debts accumulating, of many troubles and trials which



would have weighed but lightly on a man in perfect health. We read also of the clients who besieged his lodgings at No. 2 Brick Court, in the Temple, and of the grief of the principal literary men of the time. The house, originally erected in 1704, and the little court near the fountain, the hall and the garden are much as they were on April 4, 1774, when he breathed his last. There was some talk of a tomb in Westminster Abbey, but nothing was done, and a grave was found for him in the narrow corner of the Temple churchyard, north of the transept and the Round Church, which must have been so familiar to him. It is said that his grave is not to be identified, but if we observe that there is only room for three graves side by side, this does not greatly signify. Here he was buried on the 9th, "when," as Laurence Hutton records, his staircase was crowded "with mourners of all ranks and conditions of life, conspicuous among them being the outcasts of both sexes, who loved and wept for him because of the goodness he had done." A plain stone marks the little burial-ground since 1860; and thither constantly come wreaths and memorials, many from America, lest the visitor should fail to find the place.

## KEATS AT ENFIELD

It is now a hundred years since John Keats was sent to school at Enfield. His father, a well-to-do livery-stable keeper in Finsbury, came to a tragical end within a few months, being thrown from his horse and killed while riding home from Southgate, another little town in the same district. This sad event seems to have affected the future poet in several ways. It led to his falling entirely under the influence, one cannot correctly say the control, of his mother and of her mother, Mrs. Jennings, who lived near, if not in Enfield. His mother appears, like himself, to have been the creature of impulse, and her imprudent second marriage, soon after his father's death, no doubt had its place in forming his mind. If we remember the condition of Southgate and Enfield at the beginning of the nineteenth century, we can understand better something of the boy's turn of mind. The dark woods which covered the northern parts of Middlesex, many fragments of which still remain, were calculated, even without the fatal accident in their midst which deprived John Keats of his father, to lead him to dwell on their mysterious depths and to

be attracted or repelled by their gloom. As he grew older, he peopled them in imagination with visions, often dismal. There were fairies and elfin grotts in the woods with pale kings and princes, but again they took a more cheerful aspect, and we have "woodland alleys never ending," and "bowery clefts and leafy shades." All these things, whether grave or gay, whether sad or joyful, he found in abundance close to where he lived, and there is scarcely a natural allusion or an elaborate simile in all his work which may not be traced to the unfading impressions made upon his mind in his early life at Enfield.

Within a very few years the whole aspect of this suburban village has been altered. It used to consist of a quiet street or two, interspersed with many trees, and much ivy, set off by old red brick. Then came the railway, and the scenery was speedily changed. The handsome house, with its Georgian façade, of "fine proportions and rich ornaments in moulded brick," in which Mr. John Clarke kept his school, was pulled down to make way for the station; the streets were filled with gaudy shops; and the ancient roads, with their gardens and clipped hedges, their ironwork and gate pillars, their velvet lawns on which small-paned bow windows looked out, were turned into rows of neatly stuccoed villas; trees were cut down, and a view of factory chimneys terminates what had been a sylvan vista with a faint line of blue hills.

There still long remained but little injured such

picturesque roads as the once famous Baker Street. It led north-east from Enfield towards Clay Hill and Forty Hill on the way to Cheshunt. For a mile or more it consisted of red-brick houses separated by gardens and well-wooded pleasaunces. The houses were of the most orthodox "Queen Anne" pattern, or what in America is described as "Colonial." The gardens were enclosed by low walls, finished off with brick posts topped by large balls. Toward the roadway each of these "compounds" had a wrought-iron railing of elaborate pattern, suggesting that an artist had been at work when the houses were built, perhaps the great Tijou himself who designed the grilles at St. Paul's and at Hampton Court. All these mansions, though old-fashioned, were in perfect preservation, and each had its name and history when Keats was at school. It is not yet twenty years since the first of them was pulled down to make way for a row of small—and hideous—houses. For the railway had brought London to Enfield, and, as if to proclaim its destructive mission, began operations by the removal of one of the most beautiful and most interesting of the older buildings. This, as I have said, was the school kept by John Clarke, a clergyman, the father of Charles Cowden Clarke, one of Keats's earliest friends. The house had other claims on our regard. Mr. Colvin says of it :—

The schoolhouse occupied by Mr. Clarke had originally been built for a rich West Indian merchant, in the finest style of early

Georgian classic architecture, and stood in a pleasant and spacious garden at the lower end of the town. When, years afterwards, the site was used for a railway station, the old house was for some time allowed to stand; but later it was taken down, and the façade, with its fine proportions and rich ornaments in moulded brick, was transported to South Kensington Museum as a choice example of the style.

Thorne, in his *Environs of London*, though he says nothing of Keats at Enfield, adds considerably both to our knowledge of the house and also to the associations which clustered round it. According to this account, just before Clarke set up his school here, it was in the occupation of Isaac Disraeli, whose father, Benjamin, had settled here soon after his coming to England in 1748. His distinguished grandson and namesake says of him, "He made his fortune in the midway of life, and settled near Enfield, where he formed an Italian garden, entertained his friends, played whist with Sir Horace Mann, who was his great acquaintance, and who had known his brother at Venice as a banker." Thorne, when he has made this quotation from Lord Beaconsfield, goes on, unconsciously, to correct, in one not unimportant particular, the account given by Mr. Colvin of the house. "Its beautiful façade and *tracery-work of carved brick*, probably unrivalled in England, is doomed to destruction by the march of mechanics." Mr. Colvin speaks of "moulded brick," which would surely not have been worth preserving "as a screen in the architectural section" at South Kensington.

Before we leave the old-fashioned streets and market-



place of Enfield to seek in the neighbouring woods and the royal chase for Keats's sources of poetic inspiration, we must pay a short visit to the church and glance at those monuments which were here when the boy attended service within the old walls. We must endeavour to realise what, in the mind of a well-read and intelligent visitor, probably stood out most prominently.

A hundred years ago the operation known as "church restoration" had not been invented. It had not been discovered that parishioners who had an old church should be ashamed to let it appear old. Association still went for something, and men were proud to sit in the pews where their fathers and mothers had sat, and to see the old funeral hatchments bearing their family arms still hanging on the walls. Enfield Church had not been "restored" in Keats's time. It retained marks of the style in which it had been built while the hundred years of strife which we call the Wars of the Roses raged among the Middlesex hills and through the adjoining Chase. The most ancient and conspicuous of the monuments is that of a lady, a majority of whose relations and friends perished there or at the hands of the headsman. At the battle of Barnet the King-maker and his brother were slain with so many others of the old nobility. Barnet is the next parish. Much of the fighting was in Enfield Chase. Jocosa, in Latin, or Joyce, in English, was her name, and she was Lady Tiptoft, the daughter of Lord







Cherlton, and mother of the Earl of Worcester, whose name figures largely both in the literary and the political annals of the time, and who was beheaded on Tower Hill in 1470, when, as old Fuller says, "the axe did at one blow cut off more learning than was left in the heads of all the surviving nobility." Lady Tiptoft lived at Worcester Manor-House, an old house lately represented by Forty Hall, in this parish.

There are many other interesting monuments besides this one of Worcester's mother, with its heraldic trappings. Some of them must often have been seen by John Keats. Among them perhaps the most remarkable is a brass of a late date on Ann Gery, who, like Keats long after, seems to have been at school at Enfield in the seventeenth century. She died in 1643 :—

Here lies one interred,  
 One that scarce erred ;  
 A virgin modest, free from folly ;  
 A virgin knowing, patient, holy ;  
 A virgin blest with beauty here ;  
 A virgin crowned with glory there.  
 Holy virgins read and say  
 We shall hither all one day.  
 Live well, ye must  
 Be turned to dust.

Very often, in looking through the one little volume which is large enough to contain all Keats ever published, we come on echoes of these quaint lines :—

Thus ye live on high, and then  
 On the earth ye live again ;  
 And the souls ye left behind you  
 Teach us, here, the way to find you,  
 Where your other souls are joying,  
 Never slumber'd, never cloying.  
 Here, your earth-born souls still speak  
 To mortals, of their little week ;  
 Of their sorrows and delights ;  
 Of their passions and their spites ;  
 Of their glory and their shame ;  
 What doth strengthen and what maim.

The gorgeous figure of Lady Tiptoft, too, must have been noticed in its singular armorial mantle and emblems of greatness, that seem out of place on the tomb of one who lived amid such tragedies as the fall of the House of Lancaster and the cruel end of her nearest relatives and friends. Are they not alluded to in those early verses beginning,

Hadst thou liv'd in days of old ?

He can hardly have escaped knowledge of the proud lady's history, if only as a reader of Shakespeare :—

Hadst thou liv'd when chivalry  
 Lifted up her lance on high,  
 Tell me what thou wouldst have been ?  
 Ah ! I see the silver sheen  
 Of thy broidered, floating vest  
 Cov'ring half thine ivory breast ;  
 Which, O heavens ! I should see,  
 But that cruel destiny  
 Has placed a golden cuirass there ;  
 Keeping secret what is fair.

The allusion is plainly here to the elaborately clothed effigy in brass of Lady Tiptoft. Her mantle gives her own and her late husband's arms, only half of each shield being visible. The rest of the arms, including the three lions of England, for the lady was of royal descent, are visible among the decorations of the monument; but it is obviously to the half mantle that the poet alludes.

In the town, too, he must have seen and observed the remains of the place in which had lived the heroes and heroines of whom, as we are told, he was never tired of reading. At a time when Gothic art and English mediæval history were only beginning to be studied, he became familiar with Spenser and with Chapman's *Homer*. A little later he was much affected by the mock mediævalism, but real poetry, of Chatterton. Moreover, as Mr. Colvin records, the books he read with the greatest eagerness were those relating to ancient mythology, such as Tooke's *Pantheon*, Lemprière, and the abridgment of Spence's *Polymetis*. After he left school he constantly walked over from Edmonton to visit his old school-fellows, particularly his master's son, Cowden Clarke, and it was then he first became acquainted with the *Faërie Queene*. We can still see a few hundred yards of the road, so far unbuilt upon, between the two villages, and can picture to ourselves how the shady trees, the relics of the ancient Middlesex forest, "the glades and wildernesses," not yet altogether overwhelmed by bricks and mortar, and much more



continuous a hundred years ago, must have ministered to his poetic feeling as he walked.

To judge fully of the influence of Enfield and its surroundings upon the romantic instincts of the boy poet, a wider survey is necessary. We must seek it in the forest and the chase, which lay, and lie, on the northern side of the town. The chase, part of the primeval forest of which we read in the days of Henry II., when it was described for us by Fitzstephen in his *Life of Thomas Becket*, joins on the west the woods about Hadley and Barnet, and here the scene acquires additional interest as the field of that battle in which was decided the fate of the House of Lancaster. It must have been somewhere along this well-wooded ridge that, as we read in Shakespeare's *Henry VI.* Part iii. (Act v. sc. 2), Warwick, the King-maker, bids farewell to life in those affecting lines :—

Thus yields the cedar to the axe's edge,  
Whose arms gave shelter to the princely eagle,  
Under whose shade the ramping lion slept,  
Whose top branch over-peered Jove's spreading tree,  
And kept low shrubs from winter's powerful wind.

One is always inclined to attribute special local knowledge to Shakespeare, whether it be of Lampedusa in the Gulf of Tunis, or of the remains of the Middlesex forest ; but if such lines ever came into Keats's mind as he wandered among these woods, the frequency of cedar and of yew trees among the oaks in all the copses here must have struck him ; while the names, not perhaps so



well understood then as they are now, may have recalled the next lines :—

My parks, my walks, my manors that I had,  
Even now forsake me ; and, of all my lands,  
Is nothing left me, but my body's length.

It is still, in spite of the Enclosure Act of 1777, which had only begun to take effect when Keats walked here, full of sylvan scenery. Beech Hill Park, of some twenty acres, is now being divided into building lots ; but much more remains, and Trent Park is almost untouched and full of wild tracts. “Along the Ridge Road,” says Thorne, “and from the higher parts generally, alike from the open ways and from Trent Park, there are very wide prospects over Epping Forest to the Kent hills, and across Hertfordshire and Middlesex to Bucks and Berks.” It is hardly possible to believe we are so near London ; yet this glorious region, so full both of historical and poetical associations, as well as of the best of that “park scenery” which forms the great and peculiar boast of English landscape, is almost unknown to the modern tourist.

Trent Park is still untouched, and contains what is called the “Rough Lot,” a piece of the primeval forest. The lake is of some three or four acres. Camlet Moat, which Sir Walter Scott mentions in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, seems to have been the site of an ancient “moated grange.” Of this Scott sums up the scenery : “A wild woodland prospect led the eye at various points through

broad and apparently interminable alleys meeting at this point as from a common centre." The lake must have been in Keats's mind when he wrote *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* :—

O what can ail thee, wretched wight,  
Alone and palely loitering?  
The sedge is withered from the lake,  
And no birds sing.

The ballad was suggested to Keats by an old poem bearing the same title, which is to be found in Chaucer, being, in fact, a translation from the French of Alain Chartier.

Of the many passages which recall Keats's knowledge of the more remote shades of the old Chase, perhaps some of the lines near the beginning of *Hyperion* are the most vivid :—

As when, upon a tranced summer night,  
Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods,  
Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,  
Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,  
Save from one gradual solitary gust  
Which comes upon the silence, and dies off,  
As if the ebbing air had but one wave.

Lovers of Keats's poetry will recall many other passages in which the scenery of Enfield Chase is mentioned, alluded to, or directly described. The only lake within many miles of London which will answer to the brief lines quoted above is that which still exists in Trent Park, and which probably existed long before Trent Park itself. At the final division of the

Chase among the commoners it was found that there were more than eight thousand acres to be appropriated. In the reign of George III. the advantages of open spaces so near London had not become apparent, and, as the King himself is said to have observed, sheep are more profitable than deer. The royal share of Enfield Chase consisted of 3200 acres, while a thousand were assigned to South Mimms, two hundred and forty to Hadley, and twelve hundred to Edmonton. There remained seventeen hundred for Enfield, but many years elapsed before anything very definite was done to settle these divisions and to build farmhouses or such mansions as Trent. The first of the so-called "improvements," according to Lysons, who wrote in 1811, after Keats had left Clarke's school and been apprenticed at Edmonton, were unsuccessful. "It was some years before any great progress was made." The principal obstacle was the difficulty of clearing away the wood. It is melancholy, to say the least, to read of this lovely forest tract being treated as a settler on the Saskatchewan would treat his backwoods. The modern parishes all round—Finsbury, Wood Green, Edmonton, and Enfield among others—have carefully preserved and laid out to the best advantage the portions of "common land" which remained to them from Hornsey Wood and the other relics of the mediæval forest; but no effort of landscape-gardening can make up to us what we lost in 1777.

Lysons tells us that "the common rights, as defined

in the survey of 1650, were herbage, mastage for swine, green boughs to garnish houses, thorns for fences, and crabs and acorns gathered under the trees"—a definition which draws a picture for us in itself. The trim parks with their neat band-stands, which we are now endeavouring everywhere to secure, with our modern desire for open spaces and hygiene, can never take the place of

The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
     Fast-fading violets covered up in leaves;  
     And mid-May's eldest child,  
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
     The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

With these lines from the *Ode to a Nightingale* we may fitly conclude, for it must have been in these woods that John Keats, still young, still full of hope, still healthy and untouched by disease, first heard the song which inspired his finest lyric.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!

may be applied to the poet. His "plaintive anthem fades,"

Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
     In the next valley-glades.



FRANCIS S. WILKINSON







## EDMUND SPENSER AT PENSHURST

THE Wars of the Roses were past ; peace and peaceful employments prevailed all over England. The sad days, first of strife and cruelty, then of fear and fiery persecution, were gone by, and men who had been born in the midst of the battles' din and had grown up in daily contentions, whether of warriors or of polemical discussions, and "hating each other for the love of God," found themselves able to settle down in security in houses without moats or battlements. In these comparatively happy days it was that a new style of architecture sprang up. The greatest in the land vied with each other in designing comely palaces, and if Cecil had not made himself famous for his conduct of the affairs of State, he would be known as the first to build and the author of such piles as Burghley, Theobalds, and Cobham. The palaces of Richard II. and the days before him had been fortified castles. Even the poetry of that time and the book-lore which has bequeathed to us such rich illuminations, besides the perfection to which the art of portrait-painting and sculpture had attained, were drowned in the blood of the noblest

families. Among the arts which perished then was poetry. When Chaucer died in 1400 he left no heir, no successor, no school that could continue his song in the noise and confusion of the Wars of the Roses. With

The spacious times of Great Elizabeth

all was changed, and men might have asked, and perhaps did ask, each other, "Is no one coming to awaken for us once more the sound of Chaucer's lyre?" But the only answer could have been that of the Latin proverb, "*Poeta nascitur non fit*," and they had to wait, but not for long. The palace was being prepared, and so was the poet. Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne on the 17th November 1558, and already Edmund Spenser was five or six years old. Born in what would seem now the unpoetic region of East Smithfield, he was surrounded in those days by what must have been one of the more pleasing and rural of the suburbs of London.

John Stow, who was some five-and-twenty years the senior of the future poet, was himself about this time engaged on his edition of Chaucer. He has left a pleasant account of the region beyond East Smithfield in the early days of Elizabeth. He remembered the house of the nuns, near the small parish church of "St. Trinities" Minories, and speaks of the garden plots and other alterations in progress. He adds :

Near adjoining to this abbey, on the south side thereof, was sometime a farm belonging to the said nunnery ; at the which farm I myself in my youth have fetched many a halfpennyworth of milk, and never had less than three ale pints for a halfpenny in the

summer, nor less than one ale quart for a halfpenny in the winter, always hot from the kine, as the same was milked and strained. One Trolop, and afterwards Goodman, were the farmers there, and had thirty or forty kine to the pail.

Looking in the opposite direction, he saw the old city walls and their moat, with Aldgate a little farther north, and the red-tiled roofs above the battlements, with the mighty steeple of old St. Paul's, the tallest building at that time extant, being 524 feet high, but destined to be destroyed by fire while Spenser was a boy, namely, in 1561. It must have been round East Smithfield that Spenser acquired the love of gardens in which he vies with Chaucer. Just within Aldgate were the gardens which Lord Walden had planted in the time of the Queen's father, and at Stepney, Colet, Wentworth, and their neighbours all were learning and practising horticulture with one consent. It was to his connection with Nowell, who was one of Colet's successors as Dean of St. Paul's, that the youthful Edmund went to the then recently established Merchant Taylors' school, and his attainment of the place of principal scholar led to his being sent up to Pembroke Hall at Cambridge. There it would seem that his cultivation of the art of verse-writing interfered with his University progress, while it introduced him to the man who chiefly influenced his subsequent career. This was Philip Sidney.

About Sidney, from some charm of manner and of personal merit which, even more than his high position at the Court of the great queen, gave him influence,

there gathered many young men who, like himself, sought more in learning than mere pedantry. Sidney was especially anxious to improve the language, and thought to do so by introducing some system of prosody akin to that of quantitative Latin and Greek. Spenser, on the other hand, had by practice attained to great facility in the use of rhyme, and was unwilling to throw aside an accomplishment which had been acquired not without labour. They differed amicably, and in the controversies that ensued, while Hooker was working at prose and Harvey at blank verse, and others of the friends who gathered about Sidney and his family at various literary questions, there was no acrimony, but all were anxious for improvement. It was the glory of Spenser to take up the language where Chaucer had laid it down. Some feeling he had that, though more than a century and a half had elapsed, and though the English of the cultivated classes had altered, the language of poetry must not be too modern, the transition between the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Faërie Queene* must not be too sudden. He seems even in his earliest verses to have affected antiquated words and expressions, and even old-fashioned spelling. It may be that they accorded best with the houses he loved best, with the ancient scenes which are reflected so fondly in his poetry. The country which he made most intimately his own was that part of Kent which lies on the Medway and on its upper waters, the Eden. Here, within a few miles of each other, were some of the beautiful views which are called up when

we name Hever and Rochester, Chiddingstone and Leeds, but above all Penshurst. Sidney must have taken his friend to Penshurst before he wrote the *Shepherd's Calendar*. The scenery is reflected in all the twelve poems, closely in some, more vaguely in others, but all breathe of those fair valleys, and are peopled, not by the peasants only, but also by memories and allusions and such visions as an imaginative youth could not but summon up at the sight of ancient cromlechs, long, mysterious avenues of cyclopean stones, each with its legend, and venerable oaks, full of deep shadows and echoing with forest sounds, the songs of birds, or nightly moanings. He must have visited these regions also in winter. The first Eclogue speaks of the sad season of the year, the frosty ground, and the frozen trees :—

Such rage as winter's ringeth in my heart,  
My life-blood freezing with unkindly cold  
Such stormy stores do breed my baleful smart :  
As if my years were waste and waxen old,  
And yet, alas ! but now my spring be gone (begun)  
And yet, alas ! it is already done.

You naked trees, whose shady leaves are lost,  
Wherein the birds were wont to build their bower,  
And now are clothed with moss and hoary frost  
Instead of blossoms, wherewith your buds did flower ;  
I see your teares that from your boughs do rain,  
Whose drops in dreary icicles remain.

But, beautiful as the country is in winter and comparative sadness, summer is the poet's season ; and most of the *Shepherd's Calendar* recites the pleasure and



constantly varying experiences of the men who loved the woods and the fields, the hills and the growing corn, and the simple folk who peopled them. The happy time begins early. The Eclogue for April is full of the greatness of the queen who

Sits upon the grassy green,

and is obviously meant for Queen Elizabeth :—

Upon her head a crimson coronet  
With damask roses and daffodillies set :  
Bay leaves between  
And primroses green  
Embellish the white violet.

In May we have the fable of the Fox and the Kid, and June tells the story of the poet's ill success in his love-making :—

Though could I sing of love and tune my pipe  
Unto my plaintive pleas in verses made :  
Though would I seek for queen apples unripe  
To give my Rosalind ; and in Summer's shade  
Dight gaudy garlands was my common trade,  
To crown her golden locks : but years more ripe,  
And loss of her whose love as life I weighed,  
These weary wanton toys away did wipe.

In the Fourth Book of the *Faërie Queene* there is a list of English rivers in which the Thames and the Medway are married :—

Old Cybele, arrayed with pompous pride,  
Wearing a diadem, embattled wide



With hundred turrets, like a Turribant :  
With such an one was Thames beautifide ;  
That was to weet the famous Troynavant,  
In which her kingdomes throne is chiefly resiant.

The Thames is a favourite with Spenser both here and in the list of English rivers ; and the wedding is just what we might expect from the voyagers. We might expect to meet the name of the Medway just as we expect to meet the name of Penshurst, but the house of his friend is omitted, though many passages seem to allude to it. Among these, at the Ninth Canto of the *Faërie Queene*, we have the castle of Alma, who shows her visitor the wall, the gates, the porch, and the stately hall, with its furniture, the Steward with his red robe and white rod,

And in demeanure sober, and in counsell sage.

There is much more descriptive of such a house as Penshurst, but no mention by name.

The best way from London, and especially from that part of London which we may suppose Spenser still inhabited when he was not at Cambridge, to Penshurst must have been by the Thames first to Rochester, and then by the Medway. The name of the Medway is itself poetical, the Mead Wye, a mixture of English and Welsh. It is navigable to boats far beyond the Meads town, corrupted into Maidstone, a name sufficiently descriptive, and when it ceases to be tidal and brackish it becomes the Eden, but this is above Penshurst, where

Has the salt Medway his source  
Wherein the Nymphes doe bathe :  
The salt Medway that trickling streames  
Adown the dales of Kent.

We can easily imagine that after a discussion at Leicester House, Sidney and Spenser would take a boat at Essex Stairs, in the Outer Temple, and, floating down on the tide, reach the Medway in time to float up to Penshurst, among the "dales of Kent." The scenery along nearly all the usual route by boat is beautiful still. In the days of Elizabeth it must have been far finer. At Tilbury, on the left, where now there are villages of small houses, stacks of factory chimneys, and great docks full of ocean steamers, there were then only the red-brick buildings of the fort to which in a later century Wren was to add the picturesque stone gateway. Then rounding the wide low green fields bordering the Thames on the right, they would enter the Medway at the Nore, or "New Weir," old already by the time of the Norman Conquest. Next they would see Cobham, on the right beyond Strood, and the frowning mass of Rochester Castle on the left. The river was still navigable and tidal, and would probably be the easiest way to Penshurst from Rochester, certainly as far as Maidstone. On the height above Aylesford they might descry the curious outline of Kit's Coty House, and on the other side Southland Church, now called Snodland, where the epitaph on William Palmer—

Palmers all my fathers were—

was still new, and where another cromlech, Holborough, looked across the valley towards Kit's Coty House, both forming parts of the long series of stone monuments reaching away to the westward nearly as far as Wrotham. All such things, with their mysterious significance, would be noted by the young poet as he floated along and perhaps began to frame his episode of the marriage of the Thames and the Medway. The voyage ended is well described in the last verse of the First Book of the *Faërie Queene*. We seem to see the safe arrival of the travellers or voyagers from London :

Now, strike your sailes, yee jolly Mariners,  
For we be come unto a quiet rode,  
Where we must land some of our passengers,  
And light this weary vessell of her lode :  
Here she awhile may make her safe abode,  
Till she repaired have her tackles spent,  
And wants supplide ; and then againe abroad  
On the long voiage whereto she is bent :  
Well may she speede, and fairely finish her intent !

It would be but too easy to find descriptions of Sidney's birthplace in the works of contemporary writers. Spenser, as we have observed, does not mention it by name, but Ben Jonson says, in *The Forest*,

Thou are not, Penshurst, built to envious shew,

and goes on

But stan'st an ancient pile ;

and Spenser must have had it in his mind in many

passages which answer best to it and to no other. For example, we take the description in the Third Book of the *Faërie Queene* :—

At last, as nigh out of the wood she came,  
A stately Castle farre away she spyde,  
To which her steps directly she did frame.  
That Castle was most goodlie edifyde,  
And plac'd for pleasure nigh that Forrest syde :  
But faire before the gate a spacious Plaine,  
Mantled with greene, itself did spredden wide.

Sidney's death and that of Sidney's father, Sir Henry, President of Wales and Viceroy of Ireland, occurred in the same year, 1586. A portion of Penshurst is still named the President's Court. The death of the friend of his youth, after lingering long from a wound received at Zutphen, must have been a sad blow to Spenser. Sidney never saw the printed *Faërie Queene*, although, like Raleigh, he may have seen such parts as were written out four years before, that is before Raleigh's journey to Ireland, when he visited Spenser at Kilcolman. Much of the poet's life there must have been pure exile, though the Blackwater, which he calls "swift Awin Duff," is, at Lismore especially, reckoned one of the most beautiful rivers in Ireland. Munster was about as far from Kent in those days as New Zealand is now, reckoning by days' journeys. When the end of all his hopes came, when his castle had been burnt and his child murdered, he and his wife escaped to London,

and we, strictly speaking, hear no more of him. According to the strange legend ascribed to Ben Jonson, he died "for lake of bread" at King Street, Westminster, in January 1599, a story absolutely refused by Dean Church in his admirable biography. The Dean, however, sums up the facts thus: "The first of English poets perished miserably and prematurely." Jonson added to the first part of his tale one which we may accept. The Earl of Essex sent him "twenty pieces," which the dying poet rejected, saying bitterly he had no time to spend them. He was buried near the tomb of Chaucer in what is now known as the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey, and the assembly of literary men and poets gathered at the funeral wrote elegies and epitaphs which they threw with their pens into his grave.

Spenser's family was undoubtedly connected with the Northamptonshire family of Spencer. The difference of a single letter in the uncertain spelling of the sixteenth century did not signify much. They were wealthy graziers in the midland counties; two of them, who would seem to have been in the great staple wool trade, were Lord Mayors in 1527 and 1594. The poet's branch was long before of some local consideration in East Lancashire; but, though Edmund was acquainted with heraldry, we are not informed as to his coat of arms. This has lately been a matter of some controversy, the two Lord Mayors using coats not in the least resembling those now borne by the Spencers of



Althorpe. The sixteenth century heralds assigned to this family the arms of the long extinct Despencers. Mr. Round in his *Peerage Studies* shows plainly that in 1504 a coat more or less varied from that of the London aldermen was granted to John Spencer of Althorpe; and as Mr. Round remarks, "the fess between six seamews' heads" is hostile to the claim that the family was already entitled to the arms of the baronial Despencers. "The first effigy on which is found the differenced coat of the baronial Despencers is that of Sir John Spencer, who died in 1586." It is therefore unlikely that Edmund, though he claimed close affinity with the subsequently ennobled Spencers of Althorpe, had any more right than they to the curious and complicated shield of the Earls of Winchester and of Gloucester in the fourteenth century. Descendants of the poet still exist, and the *Dictionary of National Biography* mentions Mr. Edmund Spenser Tiddeman, rector of West Hanningfield, as the present representative of the family.



## THOMAS MOORE IN WICKLOW

THOMAS MOORE was born to a grocer and his wife in Aungier Street, Dublin, in 1779. In 1794 he entered Trinity College, the penal laws against the Roman Catholics having at this time been somewhat relaxed, though he was not allowed to hold the scholarship he had won. Five years later he was entered at the Middle Temple, but cannot be said to have ever seriously studied law. He had begun to make himself known as a lyric poet while he was still little more than a boy. His friendship with Robert Emmet is celebrated in such verses as *O breathe not his Name* and *Let Erin remember the Days of Old*. But his poetical powers showed themselves more clearly when he came to speak of Emmet's love for Sarah Curran, and probably never rose higher than in the touching lines :—

She sings the wild songs of her dear native plains,  
Every note which he loved awaking ;—  
Ah ! little they think who delight in her strains  
How the heart of the Minstrel is breaking.

Moore's fame was sudden and early, but never flagged while he lived. His verses are easily criticised, and their fall into oblivion has been prophesied from

the first ; but many of them still live, and others, like *Oft in the Stilly Night* and *Flow on, thou Shining River*, seem to wake up at irregular intervals, when perhaps some famous musician revives their popularity, or they are found, like *The Last Rose of Summer*, forming the motive of a fashionable opera. He was fortunate in his prolonged friendship with Lord Moira, afterwards Marquis of Hastings, who favoured him for many years and practically caused him to settle in England ; but by obtaining for the poet the uncongenial office of Admiralty Registrar of Bermuda he gave Moore an opportunity of seeing the world. The profits of this office were considerable, especially in time of war ; but when Moore obtained leave to appoint a deputy and to return home himself, he took a step which involved him in endless complications, and the money troubles which ensued were most galling to his punctilious sense of honour. They served one purpose, however, which is not to be wholly regretted, namely, by showing how independent and exact even a poet could be ; while, though himself at the height of his fame, earning sums which vie with those offered to Scott or Byron, he was living almost in penury to pay off his debts to the Treasury.

It would scarcely be correct to describe Thomas Moore as a great poet. It would be at least equally incorrect to call him a great musician. Yet his poetry and his music have reached and influenced, and, above all, given pleasure to thousands whose lives might other-

wise be considered to lie wholly beyond the reach of either the one or the other. The secret of this widespread influence is perhaps to be found in his versatility. He undoubtedly contrived, combining poetry and music, more nearly than any of his countrymen to awaken for Ireland a modest proportion of the same kind of interest that Sir Walter Scott had so abundantly shed over Scotland. It is a commonplace to say he was influenced by the scenery which he constantly visited while he remained at home, but he was also influenced, perhaps even more strongly, by the discovery, as it may be called, of popular music, then something quite novel and unstudied. Musicians write learnedly about the so-called pentatonic scale and about such mysteries to the unmusical as major sevenths and superfluous seconds; but in the days of Moore's youth it showed something little short of genius that he was able to catch these wild airs and in a sense to tame them without allowing civilisation to destroy their natural charm. In this art, a difficult one, as they know best who have tried to secure the best and most characteristic form of a popular tune where each performer has his own version, Moore excelled. In Sir John Stevenson's settings of the *Irish Melodies* he constantly shows a desire to correct irregularities, not perceiving how much of the charm is thereby lost. Moore never did this, and though he was no performer, though he had hardly any voice, he yet contrived to please the most fastidious audiences, and when he sang

a pathetic air he is described by many who heard him as able to affect even to tears people who might have been thought impervious to sentiment.

Visitors to Ireland for the first time, if bent solely on pleasure or on seeking beautiful landscape, do well to approach the east coast by one of the longer sea-routes. There is much difference between the scenery of the north and that which Moore made more peculiarly his own. Coming from the Clyde, among the western isles, the voyager finds himself in a turbulent sea, the Sound of Mull, which the poet calls Moyle, adopting the Irish spelling in the *Song of Fionnuala* :—

Silent, O Moyle, be the roar of thy water,  
Break not, ye breezes, your chain of repose,  
While, murmuring mournfully, Lir's lonely daughter,  
Tells to the night-star her tale of woes.

The Sound of Mull is seldom, indeed, still, but it is a frequent experience of the voyager to encounter a solitary swan like Fionnuala, who was condemned by some supernatural power to wander here in the shape of a wild swan throughout the ages until the coming of Christianity. This north-eastern coast, which is annually at least visited by flocks of swans, seeking the inlets and freshwater lakes, with the noble, prosaic, and busy city of Belfast in the background, forms an admirable entrance and one well associated with Moore. The very simplicity of the words suits well the weird legend, and the plaintive minor air rings in our ears sometimes for days :—









When will the day-star, mildly springing,  
Warm our isle with peace and love?  
When will Heaven, its sweet bells ringing,  
Call my spirit to the fields above?

Moore owed the legend to Lady Moira, whose residence was near Belfast.

Still more closely associated with the poet of the *Irish Melodies* is the memory of another approach to the coast. This is from a Welsh or a southern English port. In fine weather a steamer or yacht encounters at once the scenery which has entitled Ireland to be called the Emerald Isle. The greenness of the landscape, of the mountains as well as of the meadows, strikes a foreigner most forcibly. Nothing is to be seen like it on the shores of other European countries, except, perhaps, in spring at or near Palma, in the Island of Majorca. Here in Wexford and Wicklow the verdure is perennial, caused, no doubt, partly by the humidity of the climate, so that "given fine weather" is a permanent feature in every sentence of description, like "the ordnance datum" in measurements of hills. The datum of a clear sky is very needful where we want to find blue mountain peaks and deep woods; but, given that, a great many visitors, by sea or land, have agreed with Moore that

There is not in the wide world a valley so sweet  
As that vale in whose bosom the bright waters meet,

the Meeting of the Waters, a meeting repeated or imitated a little farther in the same valley, being one

of the chief features of a beautiful district. Moore has recorded the fact of his visit here in the summer of 1807, and calls the rivers the Avon and the Avoca. Barrow and others have pointed out the existence of two meetings, and most lovers of this kind of scenery prefer the place of the lower confluence to that which is usually pointed out as the subject of Moore's little poem.

This district is essentially Moore's country; and it seems as if the *Irish Melodies* are the echoes of these beautiful but in no sense magnificent hills. They begin very near Dublin, and extend for many miles through Wicklow, everywhere green and soft, but nowhere rugged or imposing, like the Mourne Mountains or those of Kerry. While he remained in Ireland he spent much time among them, and they must have always dwelt in his memory. In such scenes as were uppermost in his mind when he wrote some of his most popular songs, many "bits," as artists call them, occur which seem to belong to this part of Wicklow, and to no other region in our islands. There is finer scenery, by far, in Killarney or the Mourne Mountains in Down, or among the dales of Antrim. But it is by its sweetness that the valley on the southern slopes of Douce and Slieve na Poila, the Black Mountains and the Forked Hills, or Great and Little Sugar-Loaf, excels them all. The views from these heights include the Channel and the little blue triangles, peeping over the eastern horizon, which mark the situation of Snowdon. All the

favourite resorts of the modern visitor in this region may be found without any great exertion within the few miles which stretch from Powerscourt and its waterfall to Shelton Abbey, beyond the farthest of the Meetings.

The "Meeting" is that of the Great Avon, or Avonmore, with the Little Avon, or Avonbeg. The rival meeting, very near Shelton, is preferred for its beauty by people who admire this kind of scenery. The first junction turns the two Avons into the Avoca; when the Avoca is about to pass the Wooden Bridge, a very favourite resort, it receives two small rivers, the Gold Mines and the Aughrim. A little gold has been found in the copper ore extracted from the rocks here, but hardly enough to pay for the deterioration of the landscape by blasting and tall, ungraceful chimneys. The return cannot have been such as Moore tells of

When Malachi wore the collar of gold  
Which he won from the proud invader.

A railway now runs through the valley, where Moore must have walked.

At every turn we hear his name, and Moore's Tree is but one of many local reminiscences more or less authentic. It has perished through visitors cutting the bark, and is or was lately a leafless skeleton. Arklow, a flourishing little seaport with a cordite factory, is on the coast, close by.

Crossing from the Dublin mountains to those of Wicklow, we come to places actually mentioned by

name, to others mentioned by allusion, and to an immense number which owe their celebrity as much to guides and guide-books as to any real connection with the poet. The retrospective views as we ascend over Dublin Bay and then over Bray Head, Dalkey Island, or, in the opposite direction, to Blessington and the tallest of the Wicklow range, a few miles inland, are sufficiently attractive, but the distant views, like this, soon give place to the green vales and wooded glens which are most characteristic of the region. The distance retires for a time, and what there is to see is seen close at hand. Douce (Dubh-ais), the Black Mountain, and the Dargle (Dear gail), the little red spot, are famous, and nearly as much so is the Glen of the Downs, near Dalgany, with the Great Sugar-Loaf and some fine private parks. At Luggala, Moore picked up the wild air, already named *Luggala*, to which he wrote the lines :—

No, not more welcome the fairy numbers  
Of music fall on the sleeper's ear,  
When, half awakening from fearful slumbers,  
He thinks the full quire of Heaven is near.

Here, it is said in one local legend, St. Kevin, who is now chiefly to be heard of at Glendalough, first settled in a cave :—

“ Here, at least,” he calmly said,  
“ Woman ne'er shall find my bed.”

Nevertheless, he was driven far away by the importunate Kathleen.

Moore was particularly quick in picking up these

local airs. One of the most beautiful of them all, however, had been set to *Robin Adair* before his time. This was anciently known as *Aileen Aroon*, and Hollybrook, the seat of the present Sir Robert Adair-Hodson, often pointed out as the scene of the ballad, is on the threshold of the county. Moore profited by a good example, but the idea of uniting modern English words systematically with old Irish airs seems to have originated with Power, a musical publisher, about 1807. It was warmly accepted by Moore, to whom several collections of popular melodies were familiar. They had been taken down from travelling harpers and other itinerant musicians by Bunting, whose collection is the best, Lady Morgan, and a few more, but differ considerably among themselves. These airs, if we endeavour to describe them in unscientific language, had one quality in common. They were all, with a few trifling exceptions, of a kind which could be played on an instrument the notes of which sounded the five black notes of a piano. These five notes give to this scale the formidable name of pentatonic, and will be recognised even by an ear unused to music in such a familiar tune as *The Last Rose of Summer* or *The Minstrel Boy*. For the most part they occur in the Irish collections, but many of them are common also in Scotland, and at least one was well known for many generations in England. This begins

My lodging is on the cold ground,  
And very poor is my fare,



in the English version. The Irish name is translated *I see them on their Winding Way* in the collections. Moore has used it for

Believe me, if all those endearing young charms.

Some of the Irish music is of a melancholy and plaintive character, and in some a minor key, often with a curious change at the end, is used. The late Karl Engel describes this change in his *Study of National Music*, and shows that the pentatonic scale is that of G flat major or F sharp major. In the beautiful air known as *The Flowers of the Forest*, which is given in Engel's *Music of the Most Ancient Nations* as typical of Scottish melody, he remarks on the change of key in the last line, and something of the same kind occurs in *Silent, O Moyle*, noticed above. It may be doubted if Moore cared at all for these and similar niceties, while it is pretty certain that his chief guide in the selection of tunes was that they should adhere to the pentatonic scale. He mentions in the original preface to the *Irish Melodies* that it was through Bunting's book that he first became "acquainted with the beauties of our native music." He tells us that this was in 1797, and that no very long time elapsed before he was "the happy proprietor of a copy of the work, and though never regularly instructed in music, could play over the airs with tolerable facility on the piano." The names in Bunting's book are very quaint. One is *The Pretty Girl milking her Cow*, and



another, which Moore mentions as having been set to *Let Erin remember the Days of Old*, was *The Red Fox*. A third is *The Twisting of the Rope*, and, no doubt, each refers to a song the words of which were in the Irish language.

It has been remarked that in some of the *Irish Melodies* he has written from what is geographically an English standpoint. Thus in the lines, otherwise descriptive of the coast here,

How dear to me the hour when daylight dies,  
And sunbeams melt along the silent sea,

there is a reference not to an eastern but a western view :—

And, as I watch the line of light, that plays  
Along the smooth wave t'ward the burning west,  
I long to tread that golden path of rays,  
And think 'twould lead to some bright isle of rest.

Some of the poems were certainly written in England, and Moore himself tells us that *When first I met Thee* was sung “among a large party staying at Chatsworth,” where it was specially noticed by Byron. On the other hand, one of the sweetest of the *Melodies* is set to words which answer best to a western coast, a coast that is facing east :—

I saw from the beach, when the morning was shining,  
A bark o'er the waters move gloriously on ;  
I came when the sun o'er that beach was declining,  
The bark was still there, but the waters were gone.

The distinct allusions to this coast are, however,

sufficiently numerous. The legend of the lake whose gloomy shore

Skylark never warbled o'er ;

the allusion to the Wicklow gold-mines in

Has sorrow thy young days shaded ;

the comparison of thoughts

whose source is hidden and high,  
Like streams that come from heavenward hills,

and many other lines especially among the early *Melodies*, point Wicklow out clearly as the scenery which most powerfully affected the mind of the young poet. He was not of age during his troubled career in Trinity College, and we can well understand that the comparative quiet of these mountains was a delicious rest after days of strife and disappointment. On the one hand his sympathies were stirred by the sufferings of many of his friends ; and on the other the sequestered valleys and woods invited him to throw politics aside and devote himself to poetry and music. As soon as he could decently do so—and Moore was always most careful of the proprieties, indeed scrupulously so during life—he left Ireland, and betook himself to the careful cultivation of his powers simply as a matter of business. In the gay world, where he was highly appreciated almost from the first, he continued to live with an honesty remarkable at the time. Another interesting characteristic was his intense





affection for his mother, who, indeed, seems to have deserved his regard.

It is not easy to criticise Moore's poetry. So much of the effect of his verses depends on the music to which they are almost inseparably united that it is difficult to judge them alone. They are not of a high order of poetry, in fact few of them rise above the level of ballads and society verses, and the attempts at epics, such as *Lalla Rookh*, are among the least to be admired; but they hit the mark at which they were aimed, and there are few, if any, modern poets who can claim a larger number of lines which have become proverbial. Sweetness, like that of the region which he made so especially his own, was what he sought, and it cannot be said that he did not attain it, though often by the sacrifice of strength, or of any higher object than that of giving pleasure.

In 1811 Moore married "a penniless and beautiful girl of sixteen," Miss Elizabeth Dyke. Of this improvident match Dr. Garnet, Mr. Gwynn, and indeed all Moore's biographers, say that it brought him the utmost connubial happiness, and that to the day of his death the spoilt pet of society loved his Bessie with an unswerving affection, sacrificing everything ambition or vanity may have offered him, and living the most domestic of lives in his little cottage at Sloperton, in Wiltshire. What this meant in days before railways we can have little idea. Even the neighbourhood of the Lansdowne family at Bowood, which gave him

frequent glimpses of the great world in which he had been so admired, cannot have made up for his periods of seclusion. But he was constantly busy. His sons, who were not worthy of their father, provided him with cause of anxiety and monetary loss. "High-minded and independent to an unusual degree," debt meant unceasing hard work. The two boys were the last survivors of the family, but both died young. Grief at their loss and disappointment weighed heavily on Moore's formerly buoyant spirits. His last few years were but too tranquil, and he gradually sank into lethargy, only rousing himself once or twice to receive his lifelong friend, Lord John Russell. He died in 1852, and was buried in the churchyard of Bromham, where a costly stained-glass window was erected by his numerous admirers. Lord John, though just then weighed down by cares of state, undertook to edit his life and letters, and secured a provision for the widow. She survived him till 1865, and lies beside him.

Here sleeps the bard who knew so well  
All the sweet windings of Apollo's shell ;  
Whether its music rolled like torrents near,  
Or died like distant streamlets on the ear.  
Sleep, sleep, mute bard ; alike unheeded now  
The storm and zephyr sweep thy lifeless brow ;—  
That storm whose rush is like thy martial lay ;  
That breeze which, like thy love-song, dies away.



## BURNS

ONLY a small number of Burns's poems were inspired by the flying visit he paid to Edinburgh, the Borders, and the Highlands. Nearly all his poetry was composed in the two regions of Scotland in which he formed more or less permanent homes at successive periods of his life, namely, the country round Ayr and Mauchline and the valley of the Nith from the farm of Ellisland to Dumfries. It is in those two regions that we must look for the scenery and other external influences that affected his character, and for the originals of the descriptions of Nature that supply the background of his poetry.

So far as his character was moulded by the influence of external Nature on his mind, we shall find the explanation of it in Ayrshire rather than in Nithsdale. It is in childhood and youth that we are most powerfully impressed by the natural scenery that reveals itself to our eyes. When Burns went to Nithsdale in 1791 he was thirty-two years old, and his character was definitely formed, so that it was no longer susceptible

to much alteration from change of environment. He learnt almost all that Nature had to teach him in Ayrshire, especially in the neighbourhood of Alloway Kirk, where he spent the first seven years of his life in the cottage built by his father, and at Mount Oliphant, two or three miles distant, where he lived on his father's farm from his seventh to his eighteenth year.

The scenery on the way from Ayr to Alloway and Mount Oliphant is not in any way remarkable. It has the ordinary characteristics of the landscapes of Lowland Scotland, including a beautiful river with green banks overshadowed by the foliage of many trees. The river that flows past Alloway is the Doon, glorified in one of the sweetest of the poet's love-songs. As he roamed in the impressionable age of boyhood by its banks, he conceived the passionate love of rivers which is such a marked characteristic of his poetry. The future poet, however, could only devote a very limited portion of his time to rambling by the banks of the Doon, and feasting his soul on the beauty that is never absent from streams of running water in the country. The winters in Ayrshire are long and bleak as compared with English winters, and, after the family had removed to Mount Oliphant, Robert Burns and his brother Gilbert, boys as they were, had to do the work of farm-labourers, enduring what the poet afterwards described as "the cheerless gloom of a hermit with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave." The life of the Scottish peasantry at





this time was indeed for the most part a long, continual struggle with the earth, and their toil was relieved by few intervals of relaxation. Outdoor sports had not much attraction for men exhausted by the hard labour by which they earned their bare subsistence. Burns and his brother, being studiously inclined, devoted their evenings in winter to reading by the light of the guttering candle-dip, but most of their neighbours had less refined tastes, and found recreation in drinking ale and whisky, as Burns himself too soon learned to do. In spring and summer the one great enthralling amusement that varied the monotony of existence consisted in love-making. In the long summer evenings lads and lasses would, after their day's work, meet by the banks of the Doon and the Ayr, where, with their souls awakened by passion, they saw earth, water, sky, and every common sight "apparelled in celestial light, the glory and the freshness of a dream."

Speaking generally, we may say that the long cold winter of Scotland, together with the absence of amusements and the rigidly solemn observance of the day of rest, would naturally tend to produce melancholy, especially in the case of a man like Burns, naturally disposed to hypochondria and feeling within him the consciousness of great powers for the development of which his lowly birth could not afford due scope. At any rate, there is sufficient evidence both in his poems and in his letters to show that Burns from his earliest youth was subject to terrible fits of depression, during



which the burden of life was almost intolerable. With reference to his *Prayer under the Pressure of Violent Anguish*, one of his earliest poems, he says that it was written at a time when his spirit was broken by repeated losses and disasters. "My body," he adds, "was attacked by that dreadful distemper, a hypochondria, the recollection of which makes me yet shudder." In a letter written in the end of 1787, he complains that the weakness of his nerves has so debilitated his mind that he dare neither review his past nor look forward into futurity. "I am quite transported," he goes on, "at the thought that ere long, perhaps very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains and uneasiness and disquietudes of this weary life; for I assure you I am heartily tired of it; and if I do not very much deceive myself, I could contentedly and gladly resign it." In this state of mind the poet was disposed to take the view of human life expressed in *Man was made to Mourn*. His deeply sympathetic nature also moved him to sorrow over the sufferings of the animal world. His mind was saddened by the consciousness that man's dominion has broken the social union that ought to exist between the higher and lower grades of animal life. It distressed him to think of the mouse's cosy home broken up by the ploughshare, of the ourie cattle and silly sheep exposed to the blasts of the bitter-biting north wind, and the miserable plight in winter of the singing-birds that had not fled to a sunnier clime:—



Ilk happing bird, wee, helpless thing,  
That, in the merry months o' spring,  
Delighted me to hear thee sing,  
                    What comes o' thee?  
Where wilt thou cow'r thy chattering wing,  
                    An' close thy e'e?

On the other hand, the principle of compensation, by which those who are liable to be plunged in the deepest abyss of melancholy are often exalted by exuberance of joy, is exemplified in Burns. Many of his poems express such gladness and uproarious merriment as are beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. When the dark fit was not on him, he derived continual pleasure from

Nature's charms, the hills and woods,  
The sweeping vales, the foaming floods.

At even, when the dewy fields were green and all Nature listened to the song of the mavis, his "heart rejoic'd in Nature's joy." In a letter to Mrs. Dunlop he expresses the effect produced on him by external nature, and gives her an interesting list of the flowers he loved best. "I have," he writes, "some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain daisy, the harebell, the foxglove, the wild brier-rose, the budding birk, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey plover in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of Devotion or Poetry."

His soul was also keenly alive to the sweet fragrance of trees and flowers. The "sweet-scented birk" and the "milk-white thorn that scents the evening gale" seem to have been the trees that he loved most. More than one passage in his poems celebrates the perfume of the bean, as for instance in the *Elegy on Captain Henderson* :

At dawn, when ev'ry grassy blade  
Droops with a diamond at its head,  
At ev'n, when beans their fragrance shed  
I' th' rustling gale.

The way in which dew brings out the fragrance of flowers finds beautiful expression in the line that tells us how "the wa'flower scents the dewy air."

Of all objects of Nature, it is clear from his letters and his poems that brooks and rivers gave most delight and solace to his soul. No one, he thought, could be a poet

Till by himself he learned to wander  
Adown some trottin' burn's meander,  
And no think lang.

Nor is this to be wondered at by any one who has seen the beautiful glens through which the streams of his native country flow. Such a typical English river as the "smug and silver Trent," the Avon or the Ouse, has a quiet beauty of its own as it runs in its channel fair and evenly through deep-meadowed valleys with its course marked by the pollards on its banks. But it is usually sluggish, and its muddy bed is often choked with weeds. Far different are the streams of Scotland,

whose waters, stained to the rich brown of a dark cairngorm by the peat mosses near their source, ripple over their pebbly channels, dash, white with foam, over high waterfalls, or cut their way through deep gorges of sandstone or granite. The fascinating variety of a Scotch burn is described, as far as words can describe it, in a stanza of the poem on Hallowe'en :—

Whiles ower a linn the burnie plays,  
 As thro' the glen it wimpl't ;  
 Whiles round a rocky scaur it strays,  
 Whiles in a wiel it dimpl't ;  
 Whiles glitter'd to the nightly rays,  
 Wi' bickerin', dancing dazzle ;  
 Whiles cookit underneath the braes,  
 Below the spreading hazel,  
 Unseen that night.

Dearest of all rivers to the poet were the Doon and the Ayr. The Doon was dear to him as the haunt of his boyhood, from which he derived his first poetic inspiration :

Bonnie Doon, where early roaming,  
 First I weaved the rustic song.

The Ayr is for ever sacred to the memory of Highland Mary, who on its banks plighted her troth to Burns and bade him what proved to be her last farewell, for she died shortly afterwards of a malignant fever at Greenock. The details of the parting scene are given in Crome's *Reliques of Burns*, where we read that "the lovers stood on each side of a small purling brook ; they laved their hands in its limpid stream, and, holding

a Bible between them, pronounced their vows to be faithful to each other." This account is confirmed by the Bible given by Burns to Highland Mary, which is now to be seen in the monument at Alloway. There are two places that compete for the honour of being the scene of this famous parting. The first is the junction of the Fail and the Ayr at Failford; but the Fail, where it flows into the Ayr, is too broad a stream for lovers to clasp hands over. All the necessary conditions seem to be better satisfied higher up the Ayr, where it is joined by Mauchline Burn. Here in a sequestered, thickly-wooded valley flows a purling stream, across the running water of which the parting lovers could easily have joined hands. That this little stream was a favourite resort is further shown by the fact that on its banks is a rock with initials and dates engraved upon it going back to the beginning of the eighteenth century. We may, therefore, reasonably suppose that the lovers all through their day of parting love wandered about Ayr's "pebbled shore o'erhung with wild woods, thickening green," and when the "glowing west" proclaimed the coming of evening, they ascended the burn to the place where they could take their last farewell with the ceremonies prescribed by local custom. No doubt the poor Highland girl knew the excessive susceptibility of her lover's heart, and hoped by solemn oaths to keep it hers for ever.

In the two poems relating to the parting with his Highland Mary, Burns describes the Ayr flowing gently









under the green birks and hawthorns. Elsewhere he gives a fine picture of the different aspect of the same river dashing with indignation against the bridges that span it :—

When heavy, dark, continued, a'-day rains  
Wi' deepening deluges o'erflow the plains ;  
When from the hills where springs the brawling Coil,  
Or stately Lugar's mossy fountains boil,  
Or where the Greenock winds his moorland course,  
Or haunted Garpal draws his feeble source,  
Arous'd by blust'ring winds and spotted thowes,  
In mony a torrent down his snaw-broo rows ;  
While crashing ice, borne on the roaring spate,  
Sweeps dams, an' mills, an' brigs, a' to the gate ;  
And from Glenbuck, down to the Ratton-key,  
Auld Ayr is just one lengthen'd tumbling sea—  
Then down ye'll hurl (deil nor ye never rise !),  
And dash the gumlie jaups up to the pouring skies.

There are few grander sights in Nature than a river in Scotland in full flood, and it is much to say that the genius of Burns does not fail to do justice to the sublimity of the spectacle.

In his treatment of winter also, Burns shows that, like Byron, he delighted in the sterner and sublimer aspects of Nature. “There is scarcely any earthly object,” we read in his commonplace book, “gives me more—I don't know if I should call it pleasure, but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me—than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood or high plantation, in a cloudy winter day, and hear a stormy wind howling among the trees and raving o'er

the plain." The same recognition of the beauty of winter is expressed in verse, in his *Epistle to William Simpson* :—

Ev'n winter bleak has charms to me,  
When winds rave thro' the naked tree ;  
Or frosts on hills of Ochiltree  
Are hoary-grey ;  
Or blinding drifts wild-furious flee,  
Dark'ning the day.

Some of the finest passages in his works are descriptive of winter, especially the stanzas on a Winter Night, beginning :—

When biting Boreas, fell and dour,  
Sharp shivers through the leafless bow'r ;  
When Phæbus gies a short-lived glow'r  
Far south the lift,  
Dim-dark'ning thro' the flaky show'r  
Or whirling drift :

Ae night the storm the steeples rock'd,  
Poor labour sweet in sleep was lock'd,  
While burns, wi' snawy wreaths up-chok'd,  
Wild-eddying swirl ;  
Or, thro' the mining outlet bock'd,  
Down headlong hurl.

In 1788 Burns left Ayrshire and settled in Dumfriesshire, but he never loved the banks of the Nith as he had loved the Ayr and the Doon. He was thinking of the land as well as of the wife he left behind him, when he sang :

O' a' the airts the wind can blaw,  
I dearly like the west.

In other verses written about the same time he

attributed a similar westward yearning to his favourite mare, Jenny Geddes, whom he had brought with him from Ayrshire :—

Dowie she saunters down Nithside,  
And aye a westlin' leuk she throws,  
While tears hap o'er her auld brown nose.

He indeed appreciated the beauty of his new surroundings ; above all he viewed with admiration the noble river which flowed past Ellisland to his last home in Dumfries, the Queen of the South. "The banks of the Nith," he acknowledges, "are as sweet poetic ground as any I ever saw." He was often seen walking along the river opposite Lincluden Abbey. It was there he saw a ghostly minstrel, when

The winds were laid, the air was still,  
The stars they shot along the sky ;  
The tod was howling on the hill,  
And the distant-echoing glens reply.

The burn adown its hazelly path  
Was rushing by the ruined wa',  
Hasting to join the sweeping Nith,  
Whose roarings seem'd to rise and fa'.

The cauld blae North was streaming forth  
Her lights wi' hissing, eerie din,  
Athort the lift they start and shift,  
Like Fortune's favours, tint as win.

But with the exception of this fine commencement to a poem with a somewhat lame and impotent conclusion, he does not do justice to the broad river "worthy of heroic song" that flowed past the home of his later

years. He leaves unsung the great castle of Caerlaverock and Sweetheart Abbey with its touching story of wifely devotion. The most famous poems that he composed in Dumfriesshire have their scenes laid far away in the land of Kyle. It was in the farmyard of Ellisland that he consecrated a night of memories and sighs to his parting from Highland Mary by the banks of the Ayr, lying sheltered by a cornstack from the cold wind, until the lessening ray of the morning star greeted the dawn. Two other beautiful love-songs composed in Nithsdale, *Flow gently, sweet Afton*, and *Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon*, prove that the poet in imagination was still haunting the rivers of Ayrshire. How clear was the memory of the scenes of his boyhood is shown in the vivid realism of the description of Tam o' Shanter's ride with its minute local allusions. This masterpiece, composed at Ellisland in the end of 1790, also reveals the deep impression produced many years before in his childish mind by the stories of an old woman called Betty Davidson, who had, he says, "the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraps, enchanted towers, giants, dragons, and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of poetry." No doubt Burns was indebted to her for the rich vein of superstition that colours some of his most famous poems. But for Betty Davidson, there would have been no *Tam o'*

*Shanter*, and he would have been less able to portray to the life Auld Nickie Ben and the observance of Hallowe'en.

Burns's appreciation of the beauty of external nature was subject to other than geographical limitations. It is evident that he found little to admire in the sea, the mountain, and the moorland. The beautiful district of Galloway uplands on the borders of Ayrshire, with its rich colours of purple and green, sometimes bright in the sunlight and sometimes softened under the glamour of cloud and mist, he describes as a "track of melancholy, joyless muirs." He never appears to have climbed Cairnsmuir or the Merrick and looked down on the sublime view of lake, mountain, and sea commanded from their summits. He can dramatically put into the mouth of a Highland girl a regretful farewell to the "mountains high-cover'd with snow," but he himself looked upon the world with the eyes of a tiller of the soil, and, as such, had a natural preference for fertile plains and rivers, which were convenient not only for romantic lovers but also for practical farmers. Tradition had many tales to tell of the ravages of Highland caterans, and the mountains were, even in the end of the eighteenth century, looked upon with hereditary antipathy by the peasants of the Lowlands as the home of "hunger'd Highland boors" naturally inclined to plunder and murder. Burns's insensibility to the beauty of the sea is still more remarkable. At his birthplace he was within easy



reach of the shore ; and later, at Mount Oliphant, Lochlea, and Mossgiel, he could not lift his eyes westward on a clear day without seeing a splendid prospect of the entrance to the Firth of Clyde with the romantic peaks of Arran in the background. But of all this we find nothing in his poetry. Perhaps the only passage indicating that he ever looked on the ocean with pleasure is in the *Vision*, where Coila says to him :

I saw thee seek the sounding shore,  
Delighted with the dashing roar.

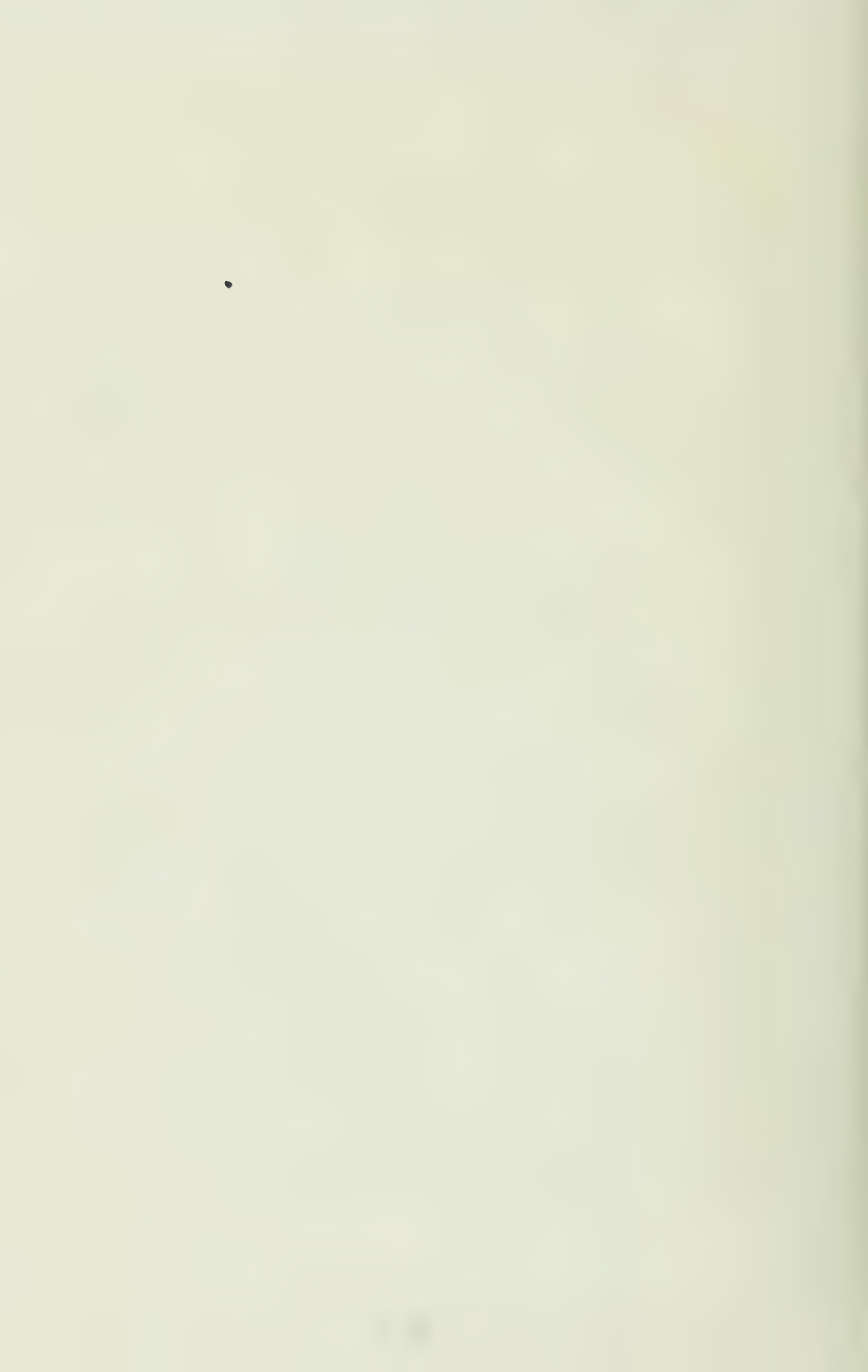
The poet generally is more inclined to regard the waves of the sea with abhorrence as conspiring with mountain and moorland to separate hearts which are, or ought to be, true to each other,

Tho' mountains rise and deserts howl,  
And oceans roar between.

It has been asserted that Burns had little of that sympathy with the traditional and historical which invests Scott's descriptions of mountain and valley with the romance of the past. It would be more true to say that lack of accurate historical knowledge prevented Burns from representing the past in his imagination as vividly and completely as his great successor does. Therefore his historical reminiscences are almost entirely confined to the best known characters of Scottish history, namely, Bruce, Wallace, Queen Mary, and the Young Chevalier. Even in the case of the Battle of Bannockburn he evidently makes the strange







mistake of supposing that the defeated English king was Edward I., for otherwise he would hardly have given him in his verse the not very appropriate epithet of "proud," and would certainly not have called him, as he does in a letter, a "cruel but able usurper." Nevertheless, as far as his knowledge allowed him, Burns took the keenest interest and pride in the "ancient glory" of his native land. "Scottish scenes," he wrote to Mrs. Dunlop, "and Scottish story are the themes I could wish to sing." He longed to be able "to make leisurely pilgrimages through Caledonia; to sit on the fields of her battles; to wander on the romantic banks of her rivers; and to muse by the stately towers or venerable ruins, once the honored abodes of her heroes." In his boyhood he pored over the story of Wallace. One fine summer day, after reading of the hero's retreat to Leglen wood, he walked there "with as much enthusiasm as ever pilgrim did to Loretto," and explored every den and dell, while his heart "glowed with a wish to be able to make a song on him in some measure equal to his merit." This aspiration he cherished to the end of his life, but never realised. Later in life, while riding across a Galloway moor between Castle Douglas and Gatehouse in a violent storm, the tune that, according to tradition, inspired the martial ardour of the Scots at Bannockburn rang through his brain. The tumult of the tempest passing through the alembic of the poet's mind, blended with the old battle strain, was transformed into heroic harmony, and the result was

the grand war lyric that thrills the heart of Greater Scotland in every quarter of the world. In two of Burns's dramatic lyrics the return of spring is pathetically described from the point of view of the exiled Prince Charlie and the imprisoned Queen of Scots. But the sentimental Jacobitism which inspired these songs prevented Burns from casting a religious halo round the moorlands stained with the blood of those who "rolled the psalm to wintry skies." Indeed, he glorifies with the name of martyr, not the Covenanters who were shot for worshipping on mountain and clough, but the instrument of the Government that oppressed them,

Great Dundee, who smiling victory led,  
And fell a martyr in her arms.

Burns, in spite of his moral failings, was full of deep religious feeling, but he was too broad-minded to feel much sympathy for any form of sectarian bigotry, however much it might be glorified by courage and devotion. Therefore he found the sanctity of religion brooding over the ruins of Lincluden Abbey rather than where the whaups cry above the tombs of the Covenanters, who had suffered martyrdom on the moorland moss at the hands of Claverhouse and Grierson of Lag.

One sentiment that pervades Burns's view of Nature is that which is called by Ruskin the pathetic fallacy. He continually looks to the external world for sympathy with human joy and sorrow, and, when he fails to find such sympathy, reproaches Nature for her callous insensibility.

Thus in his *Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson* he calls upon universal Nature to lament over the death of his friend. Milton contents himself with inviting all the flowers that sad embroidery wear to mourn for Lycidas. Burns appeals not only to his favourite flowers, but also to the groves, the burns, beasts and birds, rivers, forest, hills, plains, sun, moon, stars, and the four seasons to join in his mourning, and many of the stanzas contain exquisite miniatures of the various objects enumerated. During the golden hours of the day spent with Highland Mary on the banks of the Ayr, Nature, animate and inanimate, was infected with the spirit of love, so that

Ayr, gurgling, kiss'd his pebbled shore,  
 O'erhung with wild woods, thick'ning green;  
 The fragrant birch, and hawthorn hoar,  
 Twin'd am'rous round the raptur'd scene;  
 The flow'rs sprang wanton to be prest,  
 The birds sang love on every spray.

On the other hand, the love-lorn lady on the Banks and Braes of Bonnie Doon is tortured by the joyous songs of the birds. The same painful contrast is expressed in *Strathallan's Lament* and in another song which ends with an appeal to Winter to come and put an end to the jarring discord between the joy of Nature and the sadness of a human heart:—

Come, Winter, with thine angry howl,  
 And raging bend the naked tree;  
 Thy gloom will soothe my cheerless soul,  
 When Nature all is sad like me!



In like manner in his dirge on Winter the poet, writing in his own person, exclaims :—

The tempest's howl, it soothes my soul,  
 My griefs it seems to join ;  
 The leafless trees my fancy please,  
 Their fate resembles mine !

And in the lines on the death of Robert Dundas, the dark waste hills, the brown unsightly plains, are congenial scenes that soothe his mournful state of mind. In *Man was made to Mourn* an appropriate background for the melancholy reflections is provided by the bare fields and forests through which sweeps the surly blast of chill November. In the *Jolly Beggars*, on the contrary, the frost, hail, and cold north wind intensify by contrast the reckless merriment of the randie, gangrel bodies assembled in Poesie-Nansie's inn. So also the shepherd who has spent the wet, wintry day

Behind yon hills where Stinchar flows  
 'Mang moors and mosses many, O,

looks forward with keener zest to his evening visit to his Nannie. The angry sough of the chill, wild wintry wind enhances the pleasure that the cottar, returning on Saturday night, takes in his "wee bit ingle, blinkin' bonnilie."

In forming an estimate of Burns's treatment of natural scenery we must always remember that he is not primarily a descriptive poet. Although his soul was deeply affected by the beauty of external Nature,



he seldom or never describes it for its own sake, but, like Homer and the Greek tragedians, subordinates Nature to the fortunes and passions of men and women. Therefore we do not find in his works the long, elaborate pictures of natural scenery by which Wordsworth, Byron, and Scott reveal their attitude towards Nature. To fully appreciate Burns's wonderful power of graphic description we have to gather together the many references to external Nature scattered through his songs and other poems. This power is perhaps most brilliantly manifested in single lines and even single words that illuminate the background of his poems with the vividness and startling suddenness of lightning flashes. There is a magic touch that defies critical analysis in his word-pictures of the "glen of green breckan wi' the burn stealing through the lang yellow broom," "that hour o' night's black arch the key-stane," the "moors red-brown wi' heather bells," "the histie stibble field," "the winter's sleety dribble and cranreuch cauld," the daisy "glinting forth amid the storm," the "glowrin' trout," the frost that "crept, gently - crusting, o'er the glittering stream," and "yellow Autumn wreathed with nodding corn." Burns prided himself most on his "manners-painting strain." We may say with truth, borrowing the strong metaphor of Bacon, that no lyrics ever written were more thoroughly drenched in the flesh and blood of human passion than those of Burns. Nevertheless in his poetry we find not only the life and character of his

countrymen and countrywomen, but in the background a perfect picture of the rural scenery of lowland Scotland executed with the loving fidelity of a native of the soil. Above all his other characteristics Burns was a patriotic Scotsman. He loved his country with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength. It is this that has made him so dear to his countrymen and a bond of union to them in every quarter of the globe. Although Scotsmen in pursuit of fame and fortune and higher objects travel far from the land where their forefathers sleep.

tamen istuc mens animusque  
Fert et amat spatiis obstantia rumpere claustra.

In the poetry of Burns they find as true and vivid a picture of their native land as genius can produce through the witchery of verse. Its magic charm upon their minds is heightened by the fact that most of it is written not, as Scott's masterpieces of description are, in the "fine English" of England, but in "guid braid Scotch," that recalls to memory the voices of their mothers, nurses, and school-companions. Thus it is that the Scottish exile on the torrid plains of India or the icy gold-fields of Alaska cannot open his Burns without being immediately transported in imagination to the home of his childhood, and to the glen where perchance long ago as a barefooted child he "paidl'd i' the burn, and pu'd the gowans fine."

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